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For Immediate Release
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More Than 200 Organizations Urge Congress to Ensure Legal Counsel in Foster Care Cases Amid Access to Justice Crisis

HR 8997 would provide access to a lawyer for more than 56,000 children in foster care.

WASHINGTON—Today, the National Association of Counsel for Children and more than 200 organizations serving children and families called on Congress to ensure access to legal representation for children and parents in the child welfare system.

When a state accuses a parent of abuse or neglect, a judge in dependency court determines what happens to the child—where they live, go to school, worship, and who they can contact. Yet across 13 states, approximately 56,000 children in foster care still face court alone.

The 58 national and 150 state organizations from coast to coast asked Congressional leaders to remedy this problem by passing HR 8997, the Right to Representation Act. The bill would ensure that children in foster care and their parents receive legal representation through complex court proceedings, no matter where they live.

“Providing counsel for kids is the rare policy that helps more kids and saves taxpayer dollars.,” said **Allison Green**, Chief Legal Officer of the National Association of Counsel for Children, the leading signatory organization. “Foster care has long been a bipartisan issue, and Congress should get this over the finish line in any potential end-of-year package.”

“Effective legal advocacy in child welfare spaces can be achieved with effective legislation. This bill will ensure young people get a lawyer to help them fight for justice, no matter which state they live in,” said **Eunice Mejiadeu**, child welfare advocate with lived experience in the system.

“The child protection system is riddled with errors, operates in secret, and is shielded from accountability,” said **Darcy Olsen**, founder and CEO of the Center for the Rights of Abused Children, which represents abused and abandoned children pro bono. “Lawyers protect the rights of children and parents alike, and they are critical to ensuring due process.”

Bills to ensure legal representation for children and parents have been introduced in the 117th, 118th, and 119th Congresses. Since then, a fiscal study found that addressing the access to justice crisis for children in foster care would lead to an estimated federal savings of $81.1 million and $164.8 million per year.

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Founded in 1977, the National Association of Counsel for Children is a non-profit professional membership and advocacy organization dedicated to advancing justice for children, youth, and families. NACC provides programs, training, certification, and resources that improve the quality of legal representation for children, parents, and agencies; supports a community of dedicated professionals and helps attract diverse talent in the children's legal advocacy profession; and advocates for policies that advance children's rights, including the right to counsel. See NACCchildlaw.org.