

Date _____

The Honorable _____

ADDRESS

CITY/STATE/ZIP

Dear _____,

I write to urge you to support efforts to require child welfare agencies to conserve Social Security Administration (SSA) and Veterans Administration (VA) benefits belonging to youth in foster care for the youth's current and future unmet needs, rather than using those benefits to pay for the cost of the child's foster care placement.

I also urge you to support efforts to require child welfare agencies to screen all children upon entry to foster care for potential eligibility for federal SSA and VA benefits; apply for those benefits on the child's behalf; identify appropriate representative payees (other than the agency, whenever possible); notify the child, the child's parent/guardian, and the child's attorney/guardian ad litem (GAL) of all activity relevant to this process; and provide annual accountings of the use or conservation of the child's benefits to the child, the child's parent/guardian, and the child's attorney/GAL, in cases where the agency serves as the child's representative payee.

Young people exiting the foster care system typically lack family or other support networks to assist them, and many have not yet acquired the life skills necessary to become self-sufficient. Consequently, 25% of young adults who age out of foster care end up homeless or incarcerated within 18 months of exiting care. When these youth are eligible for federal benefits due to a disability or because they have a deceased parent, their federal benefits – if properly conserved for their future use – would extend them a lifeline that could help them bridge the difficult transition to self-sufficiency.

I urge you to do everything in your power to ensure that federal benefits belonging to youth in foster care are used and/or conserved in their best interest, as is required by law, instead of for the benefit of the state or county.

Sincerely,
