

- U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin -
The Quality Foster Care Services Act

The *Quality Foster Care Services Act (S. 1992)* is bipartisan legislation introduced by Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) and Senator Rob Portman (R-OH) that will improve foster care services for thousands of America's most vulnerable youth. This bill clarifies Medicaid policy that affects foster children with special behavioral health needs and/or medical disabilities.

Background on the *Quality Foster Care Services Act*

Therapeutic Foster Care (often referred to as "Treatment Foster Care" or TFC) is the evidence-informed, trauma-informed, and highly effective placement of children and youth with serious medical, psychological, emotional and social needs. Under the TFC model, foster parents are given special training to address the needs of youths with major mental health challenges and children receive intensive in-home services to sustain them in the community.

TFC provides critical services to approximately 40,000 foster children across the country.¹ The model works to keep its particularly vulnerable youth out of costly and often ineffective institutional care. In addition, it provides needed clinical therapy options to youth in lieu of overmedication.

Despite the clear benefits of TFC, current law does not provide for a standard definition of TFC under Medicaid. Though TFC services are provided across the country—and are reimbursed through Medicaid and other child welfare funding streams—the lack of a federal standard definition impairs TFC quality and access.²

The *Quality Foster Care Services Act* fixes this problem by establishing a federal Medicaid definition for TFC. This commonsense clarification will promote accountability for states offering TFC, identify financing options, and drive personnel training and standards.

The legislation is endorsed by a significant number of national children's and mental health organizations, including The Alliance for Children and Families, Child Welfare League of America, Children's Defense Fund, First Focus, Foster Family-based Treatment Association, KidsPeace, National Council for Community Behavioral Health, National Foster Care Coalition, and Voice for Adoption.

Bipartisan companion legislation is being introduced in the House of Representatives by Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) and Rep. Tom Cole (R-OK).

¹ Foster Family-Based Treatment Association

² A 2013 independent study from Boston University found that that all 50 states and the District of Columbia offer intensive therapeutic services of some level to foster youth with serious behavioral and/or mental health disorders under various names. The University's research showed that states currently use Medicaid reimbursement to pay for the clinical services associated with these youth's care regardless of the particular name of their state program. Its research also uncovered a significant level of confusion and lack of clarity about TFC across states (as well as within states) and in the broader child welfare field. The University concluded that a critical first step to eliminating the confusion about TFC, and bringing greater clarity to the child welfare field, is the adoption of a federal standard.

Foster Care Leadership in Wisconsin

Senator Baldwin has been inspired to improve access to high-quality foster care services nationwide because of Wisconsin's exemplary TFC agencies and families. In Wisconsin, TFC is called "Treatment Foster Care" and provides quality services across the state to roughly 1,000 children per year.³

According to Laura Boyd, Ph.D., of the Foster Family-Based Treatment Association:

"Wisconsin has long offered an exemplary TFC model of care for vulnerable foster youth who have been impacted by complex trauma, intensive mental health needs and medically fragile conditions."

As further proof of Wisconsin's leadership, this month, Anu Family Services, a leading TFC agency serving Wisconsin, was named one of 15 youth and family serving initiatives across the country making a critical difference in the lives of youth by the Center for the Study of Social Policy, a national organization based in Washington, D.C.⁴

Senator Baldwin has a strong history of supporting quality TFC services. In 2010, then-Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin introduced the Medicaid Services Restoration Act, which included, among other things, a federal Medicaid definition of TFC.⁴

Wisconsin Support for the *Quality Foster Care Services Act*

"Children's Hospital of Wisconsin applauds Senator Baldwin for championing this important legislation. By doing so she puts first the needs of the country's most vulnerable kids. As a long-standing provider of TFC we know first-hand that trauma informed, therapeutic family placements are effective in providing for the safety, permanence and well-being of children needing a higher-level of care. TFC care parents are specially trained and provide individualized, nurturing, therapeutic care. TFC is a successful and cost-effective means to care for some of our most vulnerable kids. Great progress can be made when policy makers focus on these kids."

- **Amy Herbst**

VP Child Welfare, Community Services Division, Children's Hospital of Wisconsin

"We appreciate Senator Baldwin's work to champion the *Quality Foster Care Services Act* to create a standard definition of TFC under Medicaid. Senator Baldwin has been a long-time advocate for youth and families, and we believe that her efforts to establish a federal Medicaid definition will help to promote greater clarity and standardization of TFC services across the county. We commend her efforts on this project and support the *Quality Foster Care Services Act* as an important step towards helping vulnerable youth receive the quality services they need to heal."

- **Amelia Franck Meyer, MS, MSW, LISW, APSW**

CEO, Anu Family Services, Hudson, WI

"We are very happy to support of the *Quality Foster Care Services Act*. Children in our foster care system are among the most vulnerable Americans. The maltreatment they have experienced, often perpetrated by those they know and love, is traumatizing, as is their removal from their family. Research shows that this trauma has long term negative consequences for their health, their mental health, and their ability to form relationships. Caregivers who are properly trained and supported to address the particular challenges of traumatized children with significant mental health challenges are essential to the child's current and future well-being. Having a standard definition of Treatment Foster Care under Medicaid will promote a strong, stable funding base for this very important and cost effective treatment for these very vulnerable children.

-**Ken Taylor**

Executive Director, WI Council on Children & Families

³ According to the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, 918 children were placed in a treatment foster care setting in 2012; 1,022 were placed in 2011; and 1,150 were placed in 2010.

⁴ <http://www.cssp.org/media-center/press-releases/cssp>

⁵ The Medicaid Services Restoration Act of 2010 (H.R. 4787, 111th Congress) was introduced on March 9, 2010 and shared the support of 26 bipartisan co-sponsors.