

INTRODUCING THE FOSTER
CHILDREN SELF SUPPORT ACT

HON. FORTNEY PETE STARK

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 23, 2010

Mr. STARK. Madam Speaker, I rise today to introduce the "Foster Children Self Support Act." This bill will correct a long-standing injustice that has deprived thousands of foster youth of Social Security benefits and will provide some of our most vulnerable children with a chance to succeed. I am proud to introduce this bill in partnership with Congressman LANGEVIN, who is a tireless advocate for children and individuals with disabilities.

In nearly every state in the country, foster children eligible for Social Security benefits because of a disability or the loss of a parent are having those benefits taken by the very state agencies charged with their care. The "Foster Children Self Support Act" would end that practice. Instead, it would require states to use a child's Social Security benefits to meet the immediate needs of that child or set aside those benefits to assist the child with transitioning to adulthood when that child emancipates from care.

The Congressional Research Service (CRS) estimates that approximately 30,000 foster children (out of 500,000 nationwide) receive either Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or OASDI (Old Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance) benefits each month. Unfortunately, hardly any of these children will benefit from these funds. Nor will the children have the option to conserve the funds to use when they leave care. This is because state child welfare agencies routinely make themselves the representative payee so that they have control over the child's benefits. Often, neither the child nor the child's advocate knows that Social Security benefits are being sent to the agency. Once the welfare agency controls the benefits there are few limits on what they can do with the funds.

State welfare agencies take an estimated \$156 million per year from foster children, according to a CRS analysis. The practice has devastating consequences for youth who age out of the system without supports. Former foster children face tremendous challenges. Foster children often enter care having suffered from serious emotional, mental, and/or physical abuse. For example, they suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) at a rate twice as high as Iraq War veterans. When youth emancipate from care, 37 percent experience at least one episode of homelessness and 16 percent of men are incarcerated by the age of 24. Only 48 percent of former foster youth are employed at age 24 and only 6 percent had a college degree. The "Foster Children Self Support Act" is especially important since it is safe to assume that those foster youth who have lost their parents or are eligible for SSI due to severe mental or physical disabilities are among the most vulnerable.

The "Foster Children Self Support Act" provides a way to help these young people. It does so by mandating that states develop a plan for foster children who receive Social Security benefits. The plan would describe how to use a child's Social Security benefits as a

resource to best meet the current and future needs of that child. The plan must be specific to each child receiving Social Security benefits and made in partnership with the child and the child's advocate. If this bill were law, states would no longer be allowed to simply use children's Social Security money as they see fit. Instead, this money would have to be used as any parent would use it: to provide for the child's particular needs and help plan for the child's future.

The bill will:

Require that states screen all foster children for Social Security eligibility and assist them in application;

Require states to identify other appropriate representative payees for eligible children, such as family members, before becoming the payee themselves;

Require states to develop a plan, with a child and that child's advocate(s), on how to best use the Social Security benefits to provide for the current and future needs of the child;

Provide for the conservation of Social Security funds in dedicated accounts that a child can access when they leave care to pay for things like housing, education, transportation, and other life expenses;

Exclude the conserved funds from the \$2,000 SSI resource limit to ensure that youth can accumulate a substantial amount of assets without losing their eligibility for future benefits;

Ensure that youth are provided assistance to maintain eligibility for benefits after they transition out of care;

Require the GAO to report back to Congress on states' progress in screening all foster children for Social Security eligibility.

As Members of Congress, we are the grandparents and guardians of all foster youth. We have a moral obligation to provide foster children with the resources they need to become independent adults, just as we would our own children. The "Foster Children Self Support Act" is a small part of fulfilling this obligation and a large step toward helping one of the most vulnerable groups of foster children.

I urge my colleagues to join Congressman LANGEVIN and me in support of this important legislation.

INTRODUCTION OF A RESOLUTION
TO EXPRESS CONDOLENCES AT
THE LOSS OF LIFE OF 72 PEOPLE
EXECUTED IN TAMAULIPAS,
MEXICO

HON. JAMES P. MORAN

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 23, 2010

Mr. MORAN of Virginia. Madam Speaker, today I am introducing a resolution to express our condolences at the loss of life of the 72 people who were executed in Tamaulipas, Mexico by a drug syndicate on August 25, 2010.

The United States and Mexico have a unique relationship that is vitally important to both countries and to the world.

The loss of life and the utter callousness of this act need to be on the forefront of public consciousness.

The proliferation of criminal gangs like the one responsible for this atrocious crime highlights the extreme insecurity faced by migrants.

This act only reiterates the importance of comprehensive immigration legislation on both sides of the border to place safety above all other concerns.

I ask for my colleagues' support of this resolution which calls on the governments of the United States, Mexico, and nations throughout Latin America to commit to greater collaboration on the management and reform of migration policies within and between countries, to reduce the loss of life and establish safe, legal, and orderly migration that respects and protects human rights; and work together to address the factors driving high rates of irregular migration that increasingly exposes migrants to exploitive and life-threatening conditions.

HONORING WARREN EDWARD
DIFFENDALL

HON. JOE COURTNEY

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 23, 2010

Mr. COURTNEY. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor a great American. Warren Edward Diffendall of Deep River, Connecticut passed away earlier this year and will be interred at Arlington National Cemetery this week. As a soldier and active citizen, Warren gave much of his life to our great nation.

Warren was a veteran of World War II—a Tech Sergeant in the Eighth Air Force, 489th Bomber Group, in England. He was a waist gunner on a B-24 Liberator that flew 2 historic missions on D-day. With such an honorable record in the armed services under his belt, Warren went on to serve his country for a long time after the war.

He spent many years doing good work to protect the environment and its inhabitants as a special agent for the Department of the Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and for the Department of Commerce's National Marine Fisheries Service. Having worked extensively with these organizations in Connecticut, I can tell you from firsthand experience how crucial people like Warren are to protecting the livelihoods of Connecticut's fisherman and the safety of our land and waterways. In addition, he became a passionate grower of fruits, vegetables, and flowers after settling in Deep River.

When we honor men and women like Warren Diffendall who served their nation during wartime and peacetime, we are reminded of why these individuals are referred to as our "greatest generation." I stand here today to honor the memory of Warren Diffendall for his service and sacrifice. Anyone who devoted their life to protecting our nation and ensuring its prosperity for future generations, in the manner that Warren did, is worthy of our eternal gratitude. I ask my colleagues to join me in mourning the loss and honoring the life of Warren Diffendall.