



National Council For Adoption

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact:
Chuck Johnson
(703) 299-6633
cjohnson@adoptioncouncil.org

National Council For Adoption Responds to FY 2017 Foster Care Stats

November 8, 2018 – Alexandria, VA – This morning, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families (ACF) released its annual Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data for [fiscal year 2017](#).

For the fifth consecutive year, there was an increase in the number of children in foster care, increasing by more than 6,400 children since last fiscal year to 442,995. The number of children in foster care awaiting adoption increased to 123,437, reaching a nine-year high. These are disturbing trends, as more and more children are entering temporary homes, unsure of what their futures hold.

On a positive note, the number of children adopted from foster care also increased for the third year in a row. In fact, there were 59,430 adoptions in FY 2017, the highest number of adoptions in the history of the AFCARS report. While the increase of adoptions is encouraging—showing that American families are increasingly open to adopting children through foster care—the number of children being adopted has not kept pace with the number entering care or for whom adoption is the goal. For every one child who was adopted this year, two children eligible for adoption were left waiting.

“The most recent AFCARS report is a stark reminder of the work those of us in child welfare have before us,” says NCFA vice president Ryan Hanlon. “Finding families for over 123,000 children and youth waiting on adoption is a challenging but achievable goal. We are grateful to the nearly 60,000 families who welcomed a child into their homes last year, and we encourage those who are considering adoption to take the first step and connect with a public agency in their state.”

Much of the increase of children entering care in recent years has been attributed to the growing opioid crisis affecting families across the country. The AFCARS report has included the circumstances associated with a child's removal since FY 2015. In just three years, parental drug abuse cases have grown 13% from 86,000 in FY 2015 to nearly 97,000 this past year. Child drug abuse cases have also grown slightly, with more than 6,000 cases per year.

National news stories often report on the burden the growing need for foster care services has placed on local systems around the country, leading to stories of children sleeping in child welfare offices for lack of available foster families, overuse of group home care when a family setting is more appropriate, or children unaccounted for by the welfare agencies entrusted with their care and oversight.

“One of the tragic outcomes from this year's AFCARS report is that 19,945 youth were emancipated from the child welfare system last year without family reunification or being adopted,” says NCFA's

president and CEO Chuck Johnson. “The youth who exit foster care without permanency are denied the protections that come from being a part of family, impacting their education, housing, involvement with the criminal justice system, and much more.”

While every child who ages out of care is one too many, NCFA does recognize that the number of emancipated youth has decreased each year since 2007 and is now at its lowest point in 16 years. The efforts of states to improve adoption placements, reunification efforts, and guardianships have helped more youth transition into adulthood with a support system.

Looking Ahead to the Future of Foster Care

The increase in the number of children in foster care comes at a time when states’ retention rates of foster families are frustratingly low. NCFA has found that more than half of foster families quit fostering within the first year, with many states seeing another double-digit percentage decrease in year two. These low retention rates mean fewer qualified foster families are available, result in the all-too-common practice of children transitioning more frequently between foster families, and require states to invest limited resources into the recruitment of new foster families. If states could improve retention rates of families, it would result in a more stable foster care experience for the child, a substantial savings of fiscal dollars, and dramatically increase the chances that the child will be adopted by the foster family, should adoption be the final case goal. (For reference, in FY 2017, 51% of adopted children were adopted by their foster parents.)

To address the issue of foster parent retention, in 2017 National Council For Adoption launched the Parent Recruitment and Retention Project in partnership with Northeastern University and Dr. Elise Dallimore. Currently, the project is working with public agencies in Mississippi, Missouri, and Utah to study foster and adoptive families’ experiences. At the end of the longitudinal research project, NCFA aims to develop a set of best practices regarding the recruitment and retention of foster and adoptive families.

“The challenge of finding homes for waiting children is one that will require public agencies, private agencies, and a broad spectrum of community organizations to work and partner together,” says Johnson. “We must all do more to help ensure *every* child has a loving family.”

As noted in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ [press release](#) earlier today, the Family First Prevention Services Act, signed into law earlier this year, aims to increase preventative child welfare services including substance use treatment, in-home parenting skill training, and mental health services. While this law intends to reduce the length of time children spend in care and improve reunification outcomes, it also places an emphasis on family-based foster care (versus group-based care), which will create a greater need for additional foster and adoptive families.

###

ABOUT NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR ADOPTION

Founded in 1980, National Council For Adoption (NCFA) is a global adoption advocacy nonprofit that promotes a culture of adoption through education, research, legislative action, and collaboration. As the authoritative voice for adoption, NCFA’s areas of focus include domestic infant adoption, adoption and permanency outcomes for youth in foster care, and intercountry adoption. Passionately committed to the belief that every child deserves to thrive in a nurturing, permanent family, NCFA serves children, birth parents, adopted individuals, adoptive families, and adoption professionals. In addition, we work tirelessly to educate U.S. and foreign government officials and policymakers, members of the media, and all those in the general public with an interest in adoption.

For more information, visit www.AdoptionCouncil.org.