

WASHINGTON -- Today, Representative Xavier Becerra (CA-31), Vice Chair of the House Democratic Caucus, became the original co-sponsor of Rep. Pete Stark's (CA-13) Foster Children Opportunity Act, H.R. 3333, to protect abused and neglected immigrant children in foster care and ensure they are given ample opportunity to gain legal status before they leave care.

Rep. Xavier Becerra (D-CA), original co-sponsor of FCOA: **"Our children in foster care face enormous obstacles in life. Facing wrongful deportation when they turn 21 should not be one of them. This common sense legislation prevents our children of immigrant background from falling through the bureaucratic cracks on their way to becoming productive citizens of our country."**

Rep. Pete Stark: "Allowing abused and neglected children to leave our foster care system and face deportation is completely unacceptable. The status quo must change. This legislation will enable us to better fulfill our responsibility to all foster children and provide immigrant youth with an opportunity to succeed in this country after leaving care."

Under current immigration law, many immigrant foster children are eligible for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status and other types of immigration relief. However, once young people "age out" of the foster care system they lose eligibility and risk deportation, sometimes back to the country where their abuser lives. Due to misaligned resources and flaws in the child welfare system, children fall through the cracks and leave care having lost their only opportunity to become productive adults in American society.

The Foster Children Opportunity Act makes no changes to immigration law. It simply strengthens our child welfare system to ensure all immigrant foster children receive the benefits they're eligible for under current law. More specifically, FCOA:

- Requires the child welfare system to screen children to determine if they're eligible for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), a category created by Congress with bipartisan support in 1990;
- Allocates financial resources to educate and train judges and other court personnel on the immigration issues facing foster youth;
- Requires documentation by child welfare agencies and judges in their efforts to help children obtain SIJS or other forms of immigration relief;

- Requires The Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Homeland Security to give technical assistance to state and county child welfare agencies regarding immigration;
- Ensures that foster care children who obtain SIJS status have access to federal programs -- including foster care maintenance payments, student loans, housing assistance and Medicaid -- just like other foster care children.
- The Foster Children Opportunity Act has wide support.

Some 70 groups dedicated to improving the health and well-being of children and families have endorsed the FCOA, including FirstFocus, Child Welfare League of America, Voices for America's Children, National Immigration Law Center, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, and Mental Health America.

To read a letter of support from a list of supporting groups, [click here](#).