



CENTER ON BUDGET AND POLICY PRIORITIES

820 First Street, NE, Suite 510, Washington, DC 20002
Tel: 202-408-1080 Fax: 202-408-1056 center@cbpp.org <http://www.cbpp.org>

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BUDGET EFFECTIVELY DROPS ADMINISTRATION INITIATIVES PROMISED IN CAMPAIGN TO HELP STRENGTHEN FAMILIES AND ASSIST AT-RISK CHILDREN

by Wendell Primus and Robert Greenstein

In the budget he submitted earlier this year, President Bush proposed to increase entitlement funding to states by \$200 million a year for the "Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program (PSSF)." In forwarding legislation to Congress to do just that on August 8, 2001, the Administration described the program as "a valuable safety net program, designed to strengthen families at risk and ensure the safety and permanency of placements of vulnerable children. The program provides grants to States and Indian tribes for family support, family preservation, family reunification, and adoption promotion and support services. The PSSF program is one of the few Federally supported programs to focus on helping families to stay together, avoiding removal of children from their homes, and supporting timely reunification where temporary removal has been necessary, when these measure can be taken while ensuring children's safety. The program also provides services to promote and support adoption for those children who cannot return home safely." This proposal would have made good on a campaign promise the President made to provide additional incentives to help states reunite children with their birth parents, where appropriate, or to place them for adoption or make other permanent arrangements.

The increased funds for the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program could be used for parenting skills training, respite care, and structured activities involving parents and children — all activities designed to prevent child abuse and neglect by increasing the strength and stability of families not yet in crisis. These funds also could be used to assist families already in crisis; the funds could prevent the placement of some children in foster care by funding intensive family preservation services for families in crisis or at risk. The funds also can support follow-up services for families to which a child is returning after having been in foster care. The service providers to which states could dispense these funds include faith-based and community-based organizations, among others.

The Mid-Session Review deletes the request for this increase in entitlement funding, which would have totaled \$1.8 billion over ten years under the original Administration budget. To make it appear as though the Administration is not abandoning this proposal, the Mid-Session Review says the Administration supports funding the \$1.8 billion with discretionary funds in the annual appropriations bills. But the Administration does not appear to have raised its overall request for discretionary funding to accommodate this request (or to have proposed a reduction in the amounts it is proposing for other discretionary programs to make room for these funds). Given how extraordinarily tight the funding is for programs in the Labor-Health and Human Services-Education appropriation bill, the Administration's maneuver could have the effect of killing this proposal.

The same holds true for a request in the Administration's original budget request to provide an additional \$60 million a year to states in entitlement funding for education and training vouchers to youth who age out of foster care. Approximately 16,000 children age out of foster care each year when they reach age 18 without an adoptive family or other guardian. The Administration noted in its letter transmitting this proposal to Congress in early August that "Currently, far too many of the 16,000 youths who age out of foster care are not able to pursue education or vocational training for want of sufficient resources." In proposing this increase last winter, the Administration stated that "research indicates these children have alarming rates of homelessness, early pregnancy, mental illness, unemployment, and drug abuse in the first years after they leave the system." These funds were intended to help these youth obtain support they need to develop independent and productive lives.

The Mid-Session Review drops the request for this entitlement funding increase as well, which would have cost \$500 million over ten years. Here, too, the Mid-Session Review says the Administration now supports funding this initiative with discretionary funds but provides for no increase in the discretionary funding totals to accommodate this. The Administration's revised treatment of this item may kill this proposal as well.