FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact:
Chuck Johnson
(703) 299-6633 office
(301) 751-3750 mobile

Psychologist and Child Welfare Advocate Says Government Could Save More than a Billion Per Year Helping Children in Foster Care Find Families

May 27, 2011 – Alexandria, Va. – In April 2011, President Barack Obama declared May 2011 National Foster Care Month. During National Foster Care Month, as part of its ongoing commitment to educate the public about the needs of the more than half-million children currently in foster care, the National Council For Adoption (NCFA) published Dr. Nicholas Zill’s article “Better Prospects, Lower Cost: The Case for Increasing Foster Care Adoption” in the May 2011 issue of the Adoption Advocate.

Dr. Zill, psychologist and founder of the Washington, DC-based nonprofit research center Child Trends, says that it is imperative to help find permanent families for abused and neglected children in foster care rather than allowing so many to “age out” of the system at age 18. Furthermore, he maintains, doing so would drastically reduce the high public cost of maintaining so many thousands of children in foster care.

In recent studies funded by NCFA, Dr. Zill calculated the public cost of supporting children in foster care, through money spent on the child welfare system as well as on government assistance programs that impoverished former foster youth are often forced to utilize after leaving the system.

“Dr. Zill has studied and written extensively about the development and wellbeing of adopted children. He makes the case that not only are long-term outcomes far better for children who are adopted out of foster care, but that doing the right thing – helping these children find permanent families through adoption, rather than allowing them to spend much of their young lives in foster care and then ‘age out’ without families of their own – also has the potential to save the public an enormous amount of money,” says Chuck Johnson, president and CEO of NCFA.

According to Dr. Zill, “Comparing the per-child cost of subsidized adoption from foster care with the cost of maintaining a child in foster care…the child adopted from foster care costs the public only 40 percent as much as the child who remains in foster care. The difference in cost per child per year amounts to $15,480” [emphasis added]. Dr. Zill concluded that over a billion dollars per year could be saved, and children better served, by increasing the number of children adopted out of foster care.

Johnson stresses that Dr. Zill’s findings in no way diminish the importance of efforts to reunify families or keep children with relatives that may be willing and able to care for them. While family preservation should be the goal whenever possible, however, it is not in the best interest of every child removed from his or her home. “For some abused and neglected youth in foster
care, reunification with their parents may be neither possible nor safe, and adoption represents their best chance at securing a safe, loving, permanent family."

“There is no guarantee that the more favorable home environments that adopted children enjoy will cure all the ills that early trauma may have produced in them,” Dr. Zill wrote. “But the evidence clearly indicates that adoption can substantially improve the life chances of maltreated children, and that, as a secondary interest to the public, it can do so at considerably less cost than long-term foster care.”

(Another article by Dr. Zill, “Benefits and Challenges of Adopting Children from Foster Care: Insights from a National Survey of Children’s Health”, is included in NCFA’s newly published Adoption Factbook V.)

#   #   #

*Founded in 1980, the National Council For Adoption (NCFA) is an adoption advocacy nonprofit that promotes a positive culture of adoption through education, research, and legislative action. Through its core areas of focus—infant adoption, adoption out of foster care, and intercountry adoption—NCFA serves children, birthparents, adoptive families, adoption agencies, U.S. and foreign governments, policymakers, media, and the general public as the authoritative voice for adoption.*

More information is available on our website, [www.adoptioncouncil.org](http://www.adoptioncouncil.org).