

U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Introduces legislation to strengthen support for children at risk of abuse

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WASHINGTON, D.C.—Today, U.S. Senators Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) and Tim Kaine (D-VA), both members of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee, reintroduced two pieces of legislation to strengthen America's child welfare system. The *Child Welfare Workforce Support Act* would address high turnover rates among child welfare workers, and the *Protecting LGBTQ Youth Act* would help prevent the maltreatment of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth who are more likely to experience childhood sexual abuse than their non-LGBTQ peers. The pair of bills would help ensure there are enough well-trained child welfare workers and improve outcomes for at-risk youth.

“We must do everything we can to protect the most vulnerable in our country, stand up for LGBTQ youth, and prevent child abuse,” **Senator Baldwin said.** “Our legislation will improve the quality of our child welfare system and give medical providers and child welfare professionals the tools and resources they need to step in and protect children and young people who are at risk of abuse. If we act, we will produce better outcomes for at-risk youth and our legislation takes that action.”

“It's so important for Congress to strengthen America's child welfare system to better protect vulnerable children and help them overcome the devastating impacts of abuse,” **Senator Kaine said.** “Child welfare workers, LGBTQ children, and other vulnerable youth must have the necessary resources and assistance to succeed, and I urge my colleagues to support these bills so we can ensure our system best

supports those in need.”

Careers in child welfare work are often difficult to sustain and result in high turnover rates due to their relatively low compensation and work benefits, including a 30% annual turnover rate in Virginia. High turnover decreases the quality of services delivered to children and families and results in an estimated cost of \$54,000 per worker leaving an agency.

The *Child Welfare Workforce Support Act* would:

- Direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services to conduct a five-year pilot program that would focus on building best practices for:
 - Reducing barriers to recruitment, development, and retention of child welfare workers
 - Better supporting the child welfare workforce and efforts to better meet the unique needs of infants and children
 - Providing ongoing professional development opportunities and support, including addressing secondary trauma, to improve the retention of child welfare workers
- Require programs to be monitored and evaluated by the Department of Health and Human Services and issue a report on outcomes from the pilot program

More than one in three LGBTQ youths were distrusting of their family when it comes to providing health information on COVID-19 compared to one in five straight and cisgender youth. LGBTQ youths have been less likely to have access to mental health care than their peers, with one in four LGBTQ youth unable to access the mental health care they desired.

The *Protecting LGBTQ Youth Act* would amend the *Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act* to:

- Direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services to conduct research to protect LGBTQ youth from child abuse and neglect and to improve the well-being of victims
- Expand demographic information collected to include sexual orientation and

gender identity when reporting on incidences and prevalence of child maltreatment

- Open grant funding opportunities for the training of personnel in best practices to meet the unique needs of LGBTQ youth
- Include individuals experienced in working with LGBTQ youth and families in state task forces

You can view the bill text of the *Child Welfare Workforce Support Act* [here](#).

You can view the bill text of the *Protecting LGBTQ Youth Act* [here](#).

The Senators plan to have the bills included in this year's *Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA)* reauthorization. CAPTA provides funding to states to improve child protective services and funds community-based activities that stop child abuse and neglect before it happens. Last year, Senator Kaine joined [multiple efforts](#) to push for vital resources for the child welfare system that support vulnerable children and families suffering from abuse and neglect during the COVID-19 pandemic.

An online version of this release is available [here](#).