



ACF – Broken Adoptions

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) recently issued federal guidance advising states that they can—and should—end adoption subsidies for adoptive parents who permanently surrender custody and return their children to foster care.

- Under the updated interpretation, if adoptive parents completely stop supporting the child, state funding under the agreement can drop to \$0.
- The federal letter encourages state agencies to build clear, enforceable terms into their adoption assistance agreements and to offer upfront support and resources to struggling families before breakdowns occur.

Brainstorming with ACF Leadership:

1. What if the subsidy followed the youth? In December 2024, the state of New York signed [groundbreaking legislation](#) making it the first state in the nation to ensure adoption money follows the child in cases of disrupted or "broken" adoptions.

2. Prioritizing adoptees who are abandoned when entering early adulthood. Here in Ohio, the [Adoption Assistance Program to 21](#) is only available to young people who were adopted from an Ohio Public Children Services Agency at age 16 or 17, and whose adoptive parents are maintaining parental responsibility. This means that if the adoptive parents are no longer providing support, the adoptee is ineligible.

Ohio youth leaders have asked, *"Why punish an adoptee and make them ineligible to receive help if their adoptive parents no longer provide for them? Isn't this the population that needs help the most? And if they are abandoned at or after age 18, why should it matter how old they were when they were adopted in the first place?"*

3. Accurately tracking previous adoptions in AFCARS. In 2022, USA Today noted errors, omissions and discrepancies in AFCARS data. In over 400,000 cases, records failed to indicate if the child or teen re-entered foster care after previously being adopted. When states report to AFCARS, children and teens are supposed to each have a [unique identification number](#) that stays with them over time. This enables researchers to track if youth are adopted and then return to foster care.

Data collection must also capture **"hidden" broken adoptions**—cases where the adoption fails, but the youth winds up in kinship placements, residential facilities, or experiencing homelessness rather than returning to formal foster care.