

Thanking Ryan Hanlon for Caring About Broken Adoptions

Ryan Hanlon, Ph.D., MSW serves as **Associate Commissioner of the Children's Bureau within the Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF)**. In this leadership role, he provides national guidance on child welfare policy and practice. His work encompasses preventing maltreatment, strengthening families, reducing time in foster care, and expanding pathways to safe, permanent families. One of his previous roles was President and CEO of the National Council for Adoption. He has also taught undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students.

The Administration for Children and Families 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**.

- **Appropriate Spending:** Announced in late August 2026, the directive led by Children's Bureau head Ryan Hanlon aims to ensure federal adoption assistance funds are spent appropriately rather than continuing checks for children who are no longer in the home.
- **Zero Funding:** Under the updated interpretation, if adoptive parents completely stop supporting or caring for the child, state funding under the agreement can drop to \$0.
- **Clear Agreements:** 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.

OHIO YAB members have expressed concerns about adoptive parents who receive subsidies, and then abandon adoptees at or after the age of 18. 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?"*

The state of New York is currently considering a bill that would [have the adoption subsidy follow the child in cases of disrupted adoption](#); if passed, this would be the first bill of its kind in the nation.

In 2022, USA Today released state-by-state adoption data. They found that, on average, 12 adoptions fail every day. More than 66,000 adoptees ended up in foster care between 2008-2020. Their analysis revealed that older youth, youth of color and youth with disabilities were most likely to return to foster care.

USA Today also noticed errors, omissions and discrepancies in AFCARS data. In over 400,000 cases, records failed to indicate if the child or teen had previously been adopted. AFCARS data does not capture information about children or teens whose adoptions fail, but they do not end up in foster care. Rather, these young people might move in with family or friends, be privately re-adopted, return to their birth family or end up homeless. They might also end up in a for-profit residential facility; this study found that despite representing 2% of the population, adopted youth make up 25-30% of the total population in those facilities.

Likewise, when states report to AFCARS, children and teens are supposed to each have a unique identification number that stays with them over time. This can [enable researchers to track if youth are adopted and then return to foster care](#). A 2020 study found that 16 states submit data to AFCARS in this way. At the time of the article's publication, Ohio was not one of them.