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Herger Lauds Passage of Bill to Help Place Foster and Adoptive Children in Safe Homes Sooner

(WASHINGTON, DC) – Congressman Herger today supported H.R. 5403, the Safe and Timely Interstate Placement of Foster Children Act of 2006, which the House passed by voice vote. Herger is the chairman of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources, which has jurisdiction over foster care and adoption issues, and is a cosponsor of the measure. It would encourage and reward States who quickly place foster and adopted children in safe, loving homes across state lines. Herger made the following comment after House passage:

“The Human Resources Subcommittee has conducted numerous hearings examining the Nation’s child protection system,” Herger stated. “Every witness at these hearings agreed that our current system fails to adequately protect children. The legislation approved today would help ensure that children are placed with loving families in a timely and safe way. This is an important step toward our goal of better protecting America’s children from abuse and neglect.”

The legislation would expedite the safe placement of foster and adoptive children into homes across state lines. Currently, these interstate placements take an average of one year longer than placements within a single state, delaying the safe placement of thousands of children. Among other provisions, the measure would:

1. Establish a 60-day federal deadline for completing interstate home studies, which analyze various characteristics and other factors of prospective foster care or adoptive parents to ensure that their home is appropriate for a child
2. Authorize funding for incentive payments to encourage states to complete interstate home studies within 30 days
3. Require courts to notify any foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative care givers of a child in foster care of court proceedings to be held concerning the child and strengthen the right of these individuals to be heard at permanency planning proceedings.

For more information, log on to <http://www.house.gov/herger> on the Internet!

The following is the text of Congressman Herger's floor speech in support of the Safe and Timely Interstate Placement of Foster Children Act. Video and audio of it can be accessed at: <http://www.house.gov/herger/images/CWHFosterCare-5-24-6.rm>

"I rise in support of H.R. 5403, the Safe and Timely Placement of Foster Children Act of 2006.

"I am pleased to be an original cosponsor of this bipartisan legislation, sponsored by the distinguished Gentleman from Texas, Mr. DeLay. Throughout his career the Gentleman from Texas has been an outstanding advocate for children in foster care. As Chairman of the Human Resources Subcommittee, as a longtime colleague in this body, and as someone who shares his passion for helping children, I would like to personally commend him and thank him for his dedication to helping at-risk children.

"Mr. Speaker, the Subcommittee I chair has conducted numerous hearings examining the Nation's child protection system. Every witness at these hearings has agreed that our current system fails to adequately protect children. In December, Republicans in this Congress took the lead in providing \$100 million in new funds over the next five years to better equip courts and ensure collaboration among judges and social workers.

"We also added an additional \$200 million over the next five years for improved services for families, including preventive services to protect children and keep them from having to enter foster care in the first place. Importantly, we paid for this new funding by ensuring states comply with federal law and don't misspend other federal funds. I believe these new resources will go a long way towards better protecting children.

"While these are important steps, we also must do more to ensure children are not needlessly lingering in foster care. The legislation before us today would require States to expedite the safe placement of foster and adoptive children into homes across State lines. Currently, these placements take an average of one year longer than placements within a single State, delaying permanency with loving families for thousands of children.

"This legislation also would establish deadlines for completing home studies that assess whether a home is appropriate for a child. The legislation authorizes up to \$10 million per year for incentive payments to States that complete home studies in a timely manner. In addition, the bill includes provisions to better ensure safety for children in foster and adoptive homes and to give foster parents and relative caregivers a right to be heard and notice of any court proceedings held concerning a child in their care.

"I thank my colleagues across the aisle for their assistance in bringing this bill to the floor today. I urge all my colleagues to support this legislation so that we can ensure children are placed in a timely and safe way with loving families."

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