

Fast Facts

Safe Families Act: An Alternative to Government-Run Foster Care

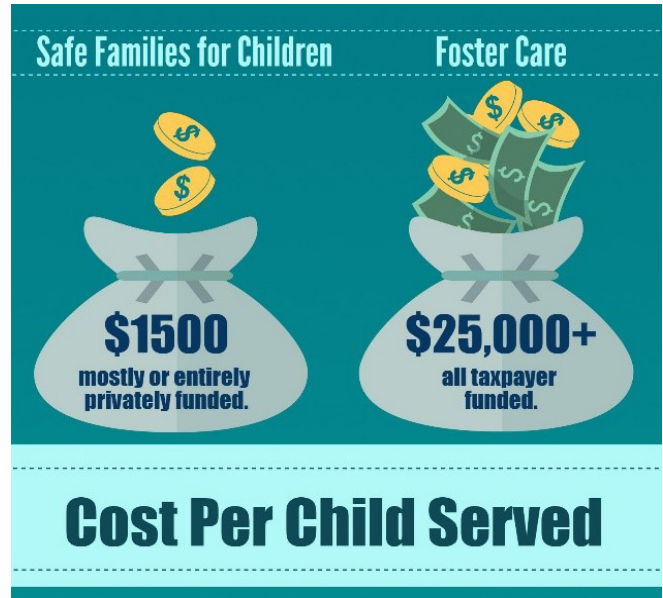
According to the South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS), 2,782 children are waiting for foster care placement in our state right now. As more and more families have broken down, DSS has become overwhelmed. Nationally, the Foundation for Government Accountability reports that an average of 403,000 kids are in the Foster Care system and the burden on social services agencies is growing.

In an effort to provide love, safety, and support to these thousands of children across the nation and relieve some of the pressure on the foster care system, states such as Wisconsin, Oregon, and Oklahoma have adopted the Safe Families Act. South Carolina would benefit from following these states' example.

What is the Safe Families Act?

The Safe Families Act is a private alternative to the government-run foster care system that seeks to aid children threatened by neglect. It's neighbor helping neighbor at its best. There are three pillars of the Safe Families Act, all with the intention of returning children to their parents as soon as possible:

- **Hosting:** Parents choose to allow certain approved families to care for their child until the parents are once again equipped to care for their own child.
- **Befriending:** The Safe Families Act is committed to providing a supportive environment for the parents of children in care. The relationship between host families, "family friends," and the parents of children in care is meant to return the ability of adequately providing for children to the parents quickly.
- **Resources/Physical Needs:** Practically, both host families and parents have a variety of needs. From rehabilitation services, job assistance, and counseling to food and childcare help, the Safe Families Act incorporates community organizations to provide for these needs.



Why is the Safe Families Act good for South Carolina?

Foster Care is overwhelmed and ineffective. The Safe Families Act provides relief to an overburdened Foster Care system and removes children from a system that has been found to produce pathologies ranging from low achievement test scores to sex trafficking.

The Safe Families Act has a history of success. While the average amount of time for a child to be in the foster care system is 702 days, the average length of stay for a child in the Safe Families system is 29 days. Furthermore, while 51% of children in the Foster Care system return home to their parents, with Safe Families Act, 90% of children have returned to their parents.

South Carolina DSS is supportive. In some states, Departments of Social Services are roadblocks to passage of legislation, openly opposing Safe Families efforts. But in South Carolina, the Department of Social Services has worked with us to strengthen the bill and support its passage.



Bethany Christian Services, with offices in Greenville, Columbia and Myrtle Beach, has launched a successful Safe Families program in South Carolina. Legislation under review at the Statehouse now will strengthen their work.