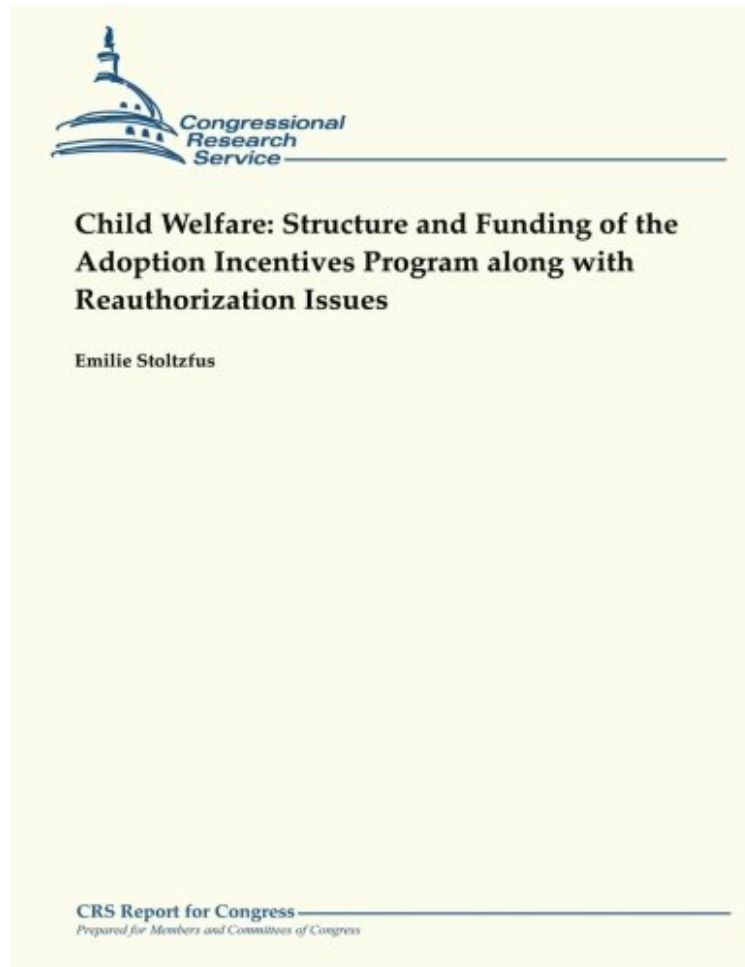


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# Child Welfare: Structure and Funding of the Adoption Incentives Program Along With Reauthorization Issues

*Emilie Stoltzfus*

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Under the Adoption Incentives program states earn federal bonuses when they increase adoptions of children who are in need of new permanent families. All 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have earned a part of the

\$375 million in Adoption Incentive funds that have been awarded since the program was established as part of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997. Funding authorized for this program has been extended twice since it was established, most recently in 2008, but is currently set to expire on September 30, 2013. Since ASFAs enactment in 1997, the annual number of children leaving foster care for adoption has risen from roughly 30,000 to more than 50,000 and the average length of time it took states to complete the adoption of a child from foster care declined by close to one year (from about four years to less than three). Over the same time period, and in significant measure due to the greater number of children leaving foster care for adoption and at a faster pace, the overall number of children who remain in foster care declined by 29%. Despite these successes, however, the number of children waiting for adoption remains more than double the number of children who are adopted during a given year. Under the current Adoption Incentive bonus structure, states earn \$4,000 for each adoption of a foster child that is above the number of foster child adoptions finalized by the state in FY2007 and \$8,000 for each adoption of an older child (9 years or older) above the number of older child adoptions it finalized in FY2007. If a state has earned an award in either of those categories or if it improves its adoption rate it earns \$4,000 for each adoption of a special needs child (under age 9) that is above the number of such adoptions it finalized in FY2007. For improving its rate of adoption, a state is eligible for additional incentive funds of \$1,000 multiplied by the increased number of adoptions that are calculated to have resulted from the improved adoption rate. However, increases in incentive amounts states earn due to improved adoption rates are only paid to those states if sufficient program appropriations are available after all awards for increases in the number of adoptions have been made. States are permitted to use Adoption Incentive bonuses to support a broad range of child welfare services to children and families. Many states report spending incentive funds on adoption-related child welfare purposes, including post-adoption support services, recruitment of adoptive homes, and training or conferences to improve adoption casework. A smaller number of states report using these funds for adoption assistance payments, improved adoption homes studies, child protection casework, foster care maintenance payments, or other child welfare purposes. Funding for the Adoption Incentives program is provided on a discretionary basis as part of the annual appropriations process. The program is authorized to receive \$43 million annually (through FY2013), but in recent years actual appropriations have been around \$39 million. Final FY2013 appropriations for the Adoption Incentives program were included in the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2013 at this same level. However, those appropriations are subject to a 5% reduction (under the March 1 sequestration order).