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'Forever families'

Legislation would create tax breaks for families that adopt older children

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LAKE VILLA -- Surrounded by six girls who have found "forever families" through adoption, U.S. Rep. Melissa Bean, R-Barrington, on Friday announced the introduction of a bill to help families who adopt older children.

The Adopt Act, also known as the Advocates Dedicated to Older Child Parental Tax Credit, would create an annual \$2,000 tax credit for families that adopt children 9 and older. The credit, which would increase annually with inflation and expire when the child turns 18, would be offered in addition to the existing one-time adoption tax credit, which this year is \$11,390.

Speaking at Kids Hope United, a child advocacy organization in Lake Villa, Bean noted that fewer than one-third of the children adopted out of foster care in 2005 were 9 or older.

"As an adoptee myself, I always appreciate that my life could have turned out so differently had they not adopted me," Bean said of her parents. "Many foster families want to adopt but have concerns about their ability to provide financially."

Mark McHugh, executive director of Kids Hope United, called the Adopt Act "a great incentive and a visionary piece of legislation.

"Teenagers and sibling groups are typically the most difficult groups to find adoptive families for, but -- just like younger children in the system -- adolescents truly need a permanent family to support them, teach them life skills and love them unconditionally."

Also speaking in support of the Adopt Act was Donna and Jerome Cole of Zion, who have adopted eight children, including a 13-year-old boy who is now was 13.

"It hurts to think of a child growing up never having someone to call 'mommy' or 'daddy,'" Donna Cole said. Foster children want permanency, they want to be loved and they want to belong. Whatever anyone can do to help foster parents become adopting parents is something that benefits everyone."

Bean introduced the bill this week in the House of Representatives, where it will be sent to the Ways and Means Committee.