

# News From The States

## EVENING WRAP

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By [Kate Queram](#)

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Kids are expensive, which I think is common knowledge. You either have kids who are expensive, or you have whiny friends with expensive kids. (Many of us are both parents and other people's whiny friends.) This is just a fact of life. Lawmakers are, somehow, still surprised by it anyway.



### The Big Takeaway

For decades, the state of Missouri has seized Social Security benefits from foster kids to help defray the cost of their care. Usually, the kids have no idea. This is legal under federal law, which permits foster care agencies to serve as financial representatives for children who are eligible for benefits, either because they have a disability or because their [parents have died](#). And it's a sizable chunk of change. Last year alone, the state confiscated at least \$6.1 million, [the Missouri Independent reported](#).



*Yeah, it's going to take a long time to count that.  
(Photo by Getty Images)*

**While technically legal, the practice is shady at best.** Most of the money goes toward routine operating costs, like food and housing reimbursements for foster parents and group homes — things that were never intended to be funded via Social Security benefits. What this means is that kids are charged for the cost of their care simply because they qualify for benefits, while others pay nothing at all.

A proposed bill would change that. The legislation, introduced last week, would allow foster care agencies to use a child's benefits only to fund "unmet needs," defined as anything beyond what the state is obligated to pay — things like tuition, transportation or technology. The state would also be required to ensure that a child's benefit account does not interfere with federal asset limits, according to the bill.

"No child really wants to be in foster care," said state Rep. Raychel Proudie, a St. Louis Democrat. "To make them pay for it is just absolutely egregious."



*Getting a leg up.  
(Photo by Roberto Westbrook/Getty Images)*

**Lawmakers in Rhode Island are mulling a different funding stream:** A bond program for babies in low-income families, [the Rhode Island Current reported](#). The proposal, [unveiled last week](#) by General Treasurer James DiOSSa, would place \$3,000 in a trust for babies born to families eligible for Medicaid. The state would manage and invest the money until the child turns 18, aiming to grow the initial deposit to a larger nest egg that could be used to buy a home, attend college or start a small business.

The goal, supporters said, is to bridge [disparities](#) by helping low-income families build wealth without taxing their already-stretched budgets.

“There is a long history of inequities in Rhode Island and in this country, and a proposal like this could change that dynamic,” said Paige Clausius-Parks, executive director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. “If we want our employment rate to be good, if we want our school systems to be good, if we want to be able to live in safe communities, everyone needs to be able to meet their basic needs.”

**Lawmakers have considered similar proposals in a dozen other states,**

including Massachusetts, where a task force in December made [broad recommendations](#) for implementation. A handful of states have already launched bond programs, including [Connecticut](#), where eligible babies receive \$3,200 in investment accounts that are projected to grow to as much as \$24,000.



*High-five, please fund my thing  
(Photo by Michael Salerno/Rhode Island Current)*

Diossa's proposal would cost roughly \$13.9 million for an initial group of 4,600 babies, according to estimates. By the time those children turn 18, that money would generate \$50 million in economic output via home sales, business growth and a more educated workforce. It's an excellent return on investment, Diossa said — but it's still a hard sell for lawmakers, who are focused on health care funding, education policy and a host of other urgent issues.

"In the short-term, we're not going to see any gains or make a difference," Diossa said. "I won't be treasurer in 18 years, but I know there will be a cohort of kids who qualify for this program who will be able to put a down payment on a home, or start a business, or continue an education."

**Indiana lawmakers on Monday called for a pause on funding cuts** to a program that pays parents who care for their disabled children after officials evaded questions about the potential impacts, including the number of affected



families and the projected savings, [the Indiana Capital Chronicle reported](#).

“What I just heard is we’re working on additional clarifications. I’ve heard we’re trying to get information. I’ve heard we’re going to adjust. I’ve heard no data,” Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch said during a meeting on the proposed changes. “At this point in time, until these questions can be answered, I would call upon [the Family and Social Services Administration] to pause in their timetable for the implementation of this program by July 1, and I would call upon the General Assembly to be supportive and look at how they can make that happen.”



*Being supportive.*

*(Photo by Karen Ducey/Getty Images)*

The cuts, announced [earlier this month](#) in response to a \$1 billion budget shortfall, would eliminate a [pandemic-era provision](#) that allowed parents and guardians to collect as much as \$15 per hour for providing care to their medically complex children. Instead, caregivers would receive a flat per-day rate, ranging from \$30 to \$70. Biological and adoptive parents would no longer be eligible for reimbursement under the proposed changes, effectively forcing parents to continue their caregiving duties without pay amid a prolonged nursing shortage.

“I have already called 40+ organizations and NOT A SINGLE ONE has staff

available,” one YouTube user wrote in the comment section of the livestreamed meeting. “Add in that I live in a rural area and it’s even harder.”

**Pressed for details, FSSA officials had no answers.** They did not respond when asked how many families might be impacted by the change, or how much money the cuts would save. An online estimate projected overall savings of \$300 million, but did not provide a program-specific breakdown. None of this inspired confidence among lawmakers, who echoed Crouch’s call for a pause.

“I think there’s too little information and too little transparency,” said state Rep. Ed Clere, a New Albany Republican. “As a result, FSSA should pause until there’s transparency and adequate information for families and other stakeholders.”



## State of Our Democracy

A contingent of Oklahoma Republicans on Saturday voted to “cease all support” for U.S. Sen. James Lankford (R-Okla.) for helping to negotiate “an open border deal to allow 5,000 illegal immigrants a day to enter and work in the United States,” [the Oklahoma Voice reported](#). This sort of symbolic gesture is always pointless (*egad, not the Support Of The Party*), but *this* symbolic gesture is *particularly* pointless, because it was not approved at an *official* meeting, according to A.J. Ferate, the party’s former chairman.

“Today an extreme faction of the [@officialOKGOP](#) held a meeting without providing an official call to all members of the State Committee, including me, to attack Senator [@jameslankford](#),” Ferate [wrote](#) on the site that everyone still refers to as Twitter. “Any vote taken by the OKGOP today was not legitimate and definitely does not represent the voice of all Oklahoma Republicans.”



*Five thousand per day!*  
(Photo by Jennifer Shutt/States Newsroom)

**The bickering is courtesy of state party vice chairman Wayne Hill**, who called Saturday's meeting [without the approval](#) of the chairman in violation of party rules. The meeting was thus unsanctioned, and members were under no obligation to attend, according to party chairman Nathan Dahm.

"Vice Chairman Hill has no authority to unilaterally call for a state committee meeting in this manner," Dahm wrote in a letter to members ahead of the gathering. "For him to do so is to intentionally disregard the rules."

Still, 175 Republicans attended the meeting, and 124 voted in favor of the resolution, which accuses Lankford of "playing fast and loose with Democrats" on border policy.

"[This] not only disenfranchises legal immigrants seeking citizenship, but it also puts the safety and security of Americans in great danger," the resolution states.

"It is our hope that Senator Lankford will acknowledge the direction of the state committee and do all in his power to defend the border from the current

invasion,” Hill added in an email later that night.

Hill got his wish — sort of — on Sunday, when Lankford “acknowledged” the “direction” of the state committee during an appearance [on Fox News](#). Their interpretation of the bill is nothing more than “internet rumors,” he said.

“It would be absurd for me to agree to 5,000 people a day,” Lankford said. “This bill focuses on getting us to zero illegal crossings a day. There’s no amnesty.”

This isn’t Lankford’s first tussle with the grassroots faction of the state GOP, which also tried to censure him [in 2021](#) after he voted to certify President Joe Biden’s election victory. That resolution was defeated by the state committee before it could wreak symbolic havoc.



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### Healthcare

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- [Kansas child welfare advocates talk resistance, lawmaker attitudes to fixing broken system](#)
- [Lawmakers renew effort to extend access to health care for undocumented Marylanders](#)
- [Missouri child care crisis a top priority for governor, bipartisan group of lawmakers](#)

### Gov & Politics

- [California lawmakers, raising fears of political violence, want to shield their properties](#)
- [Obama-era ethics czar says Fulton prosecutor should quit Georgia 2020 election interference case](#)
- [Nebraska state senator among first wave of Democratic congressional challengers drawing national interest](#)
- [Louisiana Congressman Garret Graves says he’s running for reelection – but where?](#)

### Environment



- [Agriculture built these High Plains towns. Now, it might run them dry.](#)
- [Chemical plant pollution has 'elevated' cancer risk in a West Kentucky city, study says](#)
- [Federal agency holds Grand River Dam Authority responsible for Northeast Oklahoma flooding](#)
- [Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks files notice to sue over wolverine Endangered Species Act listing](#)



## One Last Thing

Deep Sea Vision, a South Carolina exploration company, said it had captured sonar images of [what could be Amelia Earhart's plane](#). The “plane-shaped object,” which closely resembles Earhart’s Lockheed Electra aircraft, is at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean between Hawaii and Australia, about 100 miles off Howland Island, where she was expected to refuel.

"All that combined, you'd be hard-pressed to convince me that this is not an airplane, and not Amelia's plane," said Tony Romeo, the company's founder.

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