

The **Adoption and Safe Families Act** (ASFA, Public Law 105-89) was signed into law by President Bill Clinton on November 19, 1997 after having been approved by the United States Congress earlier in the month.

ASFA was enacted in an attempt to correct problems that were inherent in the foster care system that deterred the adoption of children with special needs. Many of these problems had stemmed from an earlier bill, the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980, although they had not been anticipated when that law was passed, as states decided to interpret that law as requiring biological families be kept together no matter what. The biggest change to the law was how ASFA amended Title IV-E of the Social Security Act regarding funding.

Moreover, ASFA marked a fundamental change to child welfare thinking, shifting the emphasis towards children's health and safety concerns and away from a policy of reuniting children with their birth parents without regard to prior abusiveness. As such, ASFA was considered the most sweeping change to the U.S. adoption and foster care system in some two decades. One of ASFA's lead sponsors, Republican Senator John H. Chafee of Rhode Island, said, "We will not continue the current system of always putting the needs and rights of the biological parents first. ... It's time we recognize that some families simply cannot and should not be kept together."

Ideas for the bill originated with both Democrats and Republicans. Then First Lady of the United States, Hillary Rodham Clinton originally voiced interest in the issue of orphaned children in an article she wrote in 1995. She then held public events to give the issue exposure, and met with U.S. Department of Health and Human Services officials and private foundation executives over policy questions and recommendations. The bill began in Congress with bipartisan support, then became contentious over issues of terminating birth parents' rights to children and funding levels for programs to keep children out of foster care. Hillary Clinton played a key role in finding a compromise between Republicans and Democrats on the latter issue after negotiations first broke down.

In greeting the final measure, Bill Clinton stated that the bill "makes clear that children's health and safety are the paramount concerns."

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adoption_and_Safe_Families_Act