

hearing on the use of data matching to improve customer service, increase program integrity, and achieve taxpayer savings. We received testimony in support of consistent data standards that are non-proprietary and promote the interoperability of data across various information technology platforms, including the range of State legacy systems. The hearing confirmed that not only are programs within the Subcommittee's jurisdiction in silos, but so are the accompanying data.

Applying the provisions of the Standard DATA Act across multiple programs will advance the longer-term goal of allowing data both within and across all Federal assistance programs to operate more efficiently—first by establishing standard elements for individual items of information, and second by defining, in predictable ways, how those elements relate to one another. These standardization activities will promote transparency, flexibility, and consistency across various information technology platforms established by Federal and State agencies.

This bill continues the efforts begun in the bipartisan, bicameral Child and Family Services Extension and Enhancement Act of 2011, which was our first effort at requiring a human services program to implement standard data elements and reporting. President Obama signed that bill into law on September 30, 2011.

Improved data standards will help increase the efficiency of data exchanges to use and reuse data within and across programs. That will allow States to automate the exchange of claimant data on work and benefit receipt, reducing delays and minimizing improper payments. It will also help to automate application forms by pre-populating them with reliable and verified data, which can reduce the manual burden on staff and allow them more time to engage beneficiaries, all while reducing error. That's good for program beneficiaries and taxpayers at the same time.

I thank my colleagues for co-sponsoring this important legislation, starting with Mr. DOGGETT, the Ranking Member on the Human Resources Subcommittee, as well as Mr. LEWIS of Georgia, Mr. HERGER, Mr. NUNES, Mr. TIBERI, Mr. REICHERT, Mr. BOUSTANY, Mr. PRICE of Georgia, Ms. JENKINS, Mr. PAULSEN, Mr. MARCHANT, Mr. BERG, Mrs. BLACK, and Mr. REED.

I also want to thank Oversight and Government Reform Committee Chairman ISSA and the Technology, Information Policy, Intergovernmental Relations and Procurement Reform Subcommittee Chairman LANKFORD for co-sponsoring this bill, as well as for their support and leadership on the larger effort to improve data reporting transparency.

I invite all Members to join us in supporting this important legislation designed to improve the integrity of the benefit programs millions of Americans access today, and ensure that taxpayer funds are properly spent.

INTRODUCING THE FOSTER
CHILDREN OPPORTUNITY ACT

HON. FORTNEY PETE STARK

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, November 3, 2011

Mr. STARK. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce legislation to ensure that thousands of

abused and neglected immigrant children in our foster care system have the opportunity to overcome their abuse and become successful adults.

Every year, hundreds and perhaps thousands of abused and neglected children leave the child welfare system and become illegal immigrants through no fault of their own. Under a law passed by Congress in 1990 immigrant foster youth are able to gain legal status. This status, known as Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), is available if a child is in the foster care system, under 21, and cannot be safely reunified with their family or returned to their country of origin.

SIJS ensures that the child has a recognized legal status and a pathway to becoming a citizen. After a young person leaves foster care, they are not eligible for SIJS. Unfortunately, many youth and many caseworkers are unaware of SIJS or how to apply. As a consequence, potentially eligible youth "age out" of the foster care system every year without a legal status. After being cared for by our child welfare system because they were victims of abuse and neglect, these young people then leave the system and face the threat of deportation and lack access to the supports other transitioning foster youth rely upon. My office has heard from young people who aged out of the system and others who were adopted who never heard of SIJS. These youth were forced into the underground economy, face exploitation, and live in constant fear of being deported to a country they don't know.

To fix this problem, the Foster Children Opportunity Act will require that all children in the foster care system be screened for SIJS eligibility and other forms of immigration relief. It also requires that they be assisted in applying for the status. Child welfare agencies and juvenile courts will be provided with technical assistance and additional resources to make this happen. In addition, my legislation will guarantee that youth who obtain SIJS have access to the same benefits, such as student loans, Medicaid, and food stamps that support other former foster youth as they make the transition to adulthood.

My bill will not change current immigration law. Nor will it result in any adults who have engaged in illegal behavior from gaining legal status because a person with SIJS cannot act as a sponsor for any family members. The Foster Children Opportunity Act has nothing to do with the fight over immigration reform. It is simply about fulfilling our responsibility to all abused and neglected children and providing these youth with a fighting chance to succeed. I encourage all my colleagues to join me in supporting this simple legislation that will improve the lives of thousands of vulnerable children.

IN RECOGNITION OF THE 65TH AN-
NIVERSARY OF SACRAMENTO
MUNICIPAL UTILITY DISTRICT

HON. DORIS O. MATSUI

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, November 3, 2011

Ms. MATSUI. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD), as the organization celebrates its 65th anniversary. It is a great pleas-

ure to recognize SMUD's dedication in keeping electricity rates affordable, providing customers with energy-efficient options, and supporting the deployment of renewable power. As SMUD's customers and employees gather to celebrate this milestone, I ask all my colleagues to join me in honoring the key role the organization plays in the Sacramento region.

SMUD was formed in 1946. In response to overpriced electricity, Sacramento voters opted to create a municipal utility district that would provide them with an alternative to investor owned power companies. This led to the formation of SMUD, a public utility company that measures success by how much money stays within the community through low rates, rather than going out to stockholders. SMUD has proven to be a success as their electricity rates are among the lowest in the state of California.

Over the last 65 years, SMUD has become the nation's sixth-largest public electric utility, serving nearly 600,000 customers and a population of 1.4 million. Residential and business customer satisfaction surveys consistently rank SMUD as the top provider of electricity in California, as well as one of the best in the nation.

SMUD is regarded across the nation as a leader in renewable energy and energy efficiency. In 2010, SMUD became the state's first large utility to have 20 percent of its power from renewable resources. The figure has since climbed to 24 percent and is expected to reach the state mandated 33 percent mark by 2020. Taking into account the hydroelectricity generated in SMUD's Upper American River Project, nearly 50 percent of SMUD's power comes from non-carbon resources. SMUD's energy efficiency programs have helped customers reduce their carbon dioxide emission by over 3 million tons since 1987. SMUD has also provided more than \$495 million in energy efficiency loans since 1990.

SMUD is led by a forward thinking Board of Directors, an energetic executive team, and 2,000 hard working employees. They are united in their desire to offer the Sacramento Region affordable power and an excellent customer experience.

Mr. Speaker, I am honored to pay tribute to Sacramento Municipal Utility District and their continuous commitment to providing the Sacramento Region with access to energy efficient programs, more energy choices, and affordable electricity. SMUD has contributed an immense amount to making Sacramento a better place to live, work, and do business. As SMUD's General Manager John DiStasio, Board President Renee Taylor, and others gather together to celebrate the organization's 65th anniversary, I ask all my colleagues to join me in honoring their outstanding work in providing the community with affordable electricity.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. JOE COURTNEY

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, November 3, 2011

Mr. COURTNEY. Mr. Speaker, I regret that I was unable to attend votes on Tuesday, November 1, 2011 as I was attending to needs