



# Doing it Right, Making it Work

## Extending Foster Care Policy Toolkit: Paper 3 of 5



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### Extending Foster Care

Approximately 22 states and the District of Columbia have taken advantage of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (FCA) and enacted legislation to extend foster care beyond 18. The act provides states the

option to offer Title IV-E reimbursable foster care,

adoption or guardianship assistance payments to children up to the age of 19, 20 or 21.

Child welfare experts agree that for young people to benefit from extending foster care, states must ensure services and supports that are offered are based on the unique developmental needs of youth.

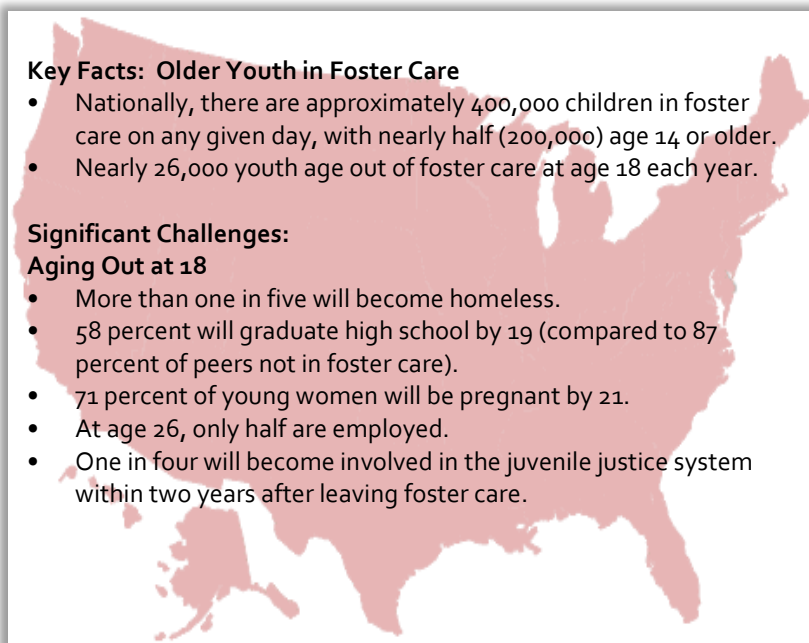
#### Key Facts: Older Youth in Foster Care

- Nationally, there are approximately 400,000 children in foster care on any given day, with nearly half (200,000) age 14 or older.
- Nearly 26,000 youth age out of foster care at age 18 each year.

#### Significant Challenges:

##### Aging Out at 18

- More than one in five will become homeless.
- 58 percent will graduate high school by 19 (compared to 87 percent of peers not in foster care).
- 71 percent of young women will be pregnant by 21.
- At age 26, only half are employed.
- One in four will become involved in the juvenile justice system within two years after leaving foster care.



They recommend:

- Collaborating with young people and other stakeholders in designing developmentally appropriate services that support education, employment, health and mental health, housing, permanency and family connections, and youth engagement.
- Leveraging federal funding and policy options that provide for the developmental needs of young adults, including supervised independent living, trial independence and re-entry to foster care, voluntary placement agreements, and direct stipends to young people.
- Defining eligibility criteria broadly and including young people with higher levels of need.

## State Actions

### Legislation

Some of the states extending foster care beyond age 18 with the support of Title IV-E are taking an incremental approach, expanding eligibility in a gradual way. Other states have extended foster care services with

#### Washington

Washington has been gradually expanding eligibility for extended foster care. In 2014, eligibility was expanded to include employed young people. Legislation introduced in 2015 would add those youth who are unable to work due to a medical condition.

state-only funds, including Delaware, Florida and Wisconsin. Florida's program gives youth the option to remain in care until they turn 21, if they are enrolled in

an eligible post-secondary institution - receive financial assistance as they continue pursuing academic and career goals. They will also continue to receive case management services and other support. Wisconsin lawmakers passed legislation in 2013 permitting a child in out-of-home care who has an individualized education program to continue in such care until he or she receives a high school diploma or its equivalent, or until age 21, whichever occurs first, as long as the he or she is a full-time high school, vocational or technical student. Also in 2013, Delaware enacted legislation requiring the child welfare agency to "implement a developmentally appropriate, comprehensive program of independent living services—such as financial

stability, housing supports, medical, employment and training, education, and connection to resources and individuals—for youth to age 21."

In alignment with research about the transition from adolescence to adulthood, there are also examples of state legislators interested in extending specific transitional services to youth in foster care beyond age 21. Maine, for example, enacted legislation in 2014 to establish a grant program to provide financial support for post-secondary education to eligible foster youth, ages 21 -27. Eligible youth must have exited the voluntary extended foster care and support program at 21 years of age and be enrolled in a post-secondary education institution. Participants will receive post-secondary education navigator services to help them find the services they need and an advisory committee will handle oversight of the grant program.

### Implementation

Lawmakers interested in extending foster care beyond age 18 may want to consider planning for both the legislation and implementation of their programs. An effective planning process may reduce the need for follow-up legislation and may help the implementation process run more smoothly. The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative recommends six planning steps:

**1. Convene a planning group of stakeholders, including legislators, agency staff, current and former foster youth, advocates and a neutral facilitator.**

**2. Review federal requirements and options.**

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 and the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014 have requirements for state legislation as well as funding opportunities for various policy options.

**3. Consider existing supports and services and seek input from young people, including youth advisory boards or councils that operate in every state.**

#### Washington

All 50 states and the District of Columbia have youth advisory boards designed to engage current and former youth in foster care in the policymaking process to improve child welfare services to this population. See Paper 2.

4. Reach an agreement on key design issues, such as eligibility for services, case management, transition planning, permanency, placement options, case review and support services.

#### 5. Project costs and revenue

As part of the discussion of the process and challenges in passing the legislation to extend care in California, funding issues were identified as a major obstacle. Because of California's budget crisis, the bill had to be cost neutral. Having this information ready prior to the legislative process may have removed a major obstacle to the bill's passage and lessened the tension between the various parties involved.



#### 6. Next Steps

California developed a Fostering Connections to Success Web page, which offers tools and youth-friendly information and updates about the California Fostering Connections Act, including administrative policy letters sent to the counties regarding implementation.

California identified four additional implementation challenges:

- Is the staff training effective?
- Are all eligible youth receiving the information about their option to stay in care?
- Are youth actually choosing to opt in to the program? Why or why not?
- If your state allows youth to re-enter foster care, how will that work and is the system prepared to handle such cases?

#### Resources:

- Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago:  
[http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/Partnership\\_Politics\\_5-2-13.pdf](http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/Partnership_Politics_5-2-13.pdf)
- California Fostering Connections Page:  
<http://www.cafosteringconnections.org/index.html>
- National Resource Center for Youth Development:  
<http://www.nrcyd.ou.edu/>
- NCSL's Summary of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act:  
<http://www.ncsl.org/documents/cyf/FosteringConnectionsSummary.pdf>
- Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative:  
[http://jimcaseyyouth.org/sites/default/files/GettingStarted.final\\_.pdf](http://jimcaseyyouth.org/sites/default/files/GettingStarted.final_.pdf)
- NCSL's Supports for Older Youth in Foster Care:  
<http://www.ncsl.org/default.aspx?tabid=28544>

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