

Serving Older Youth in Foster Care

Mississippi State Profile

BY JERARD BROWN

According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's [Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative](#), 20% of children exiting foster care will become homeless when they turn 18 and only half will attain gainful employment before age 24. Of females who age out of foster care, 71% will become pregnant before age 21. These statistics highlight the significant challenges many older youth face as they transition out of foster care. States have developed strategies to address these challenges, and NCSL has compiled a [50-state data map](#) that looks at eight policy areas related to older youth in foster care. Below is a summary of strategies Mississippi has adopted to better serve older youth in care, as well as additional strategies other states have implemented.

Foster Care in Mississippi

Nearly 1,800 of [Mississippi's](#) youth in foster care were over the age of 14 in 2018. That accounts for approximately 21% of the youth in foster care. In 2004, Children's Rights filed what became known as the [Olivia Y](#) lawsuit against the governor of Mississippi, the executive director of the Mississippi Department of Human Services and the director of the Mississippi Division of Family and Children's Services. This suit alleged that Mississippi's foster care system violated the constitutional rights of children in state custody by failing to adequately protect them and provide necessary services. In 2008, an [initial settlement](#) was reached, and the defendants agreed to meet certain standards and outcome measures within five years of the court's decision. The settlement included requiring caseload limits for caseworkers, developing a statewide child welfare information system, committing to certain placement standards and more. In [2012](#) and [2016](#), additional modified settlement agreements were reached. The latest [report](#) indicated that in 2018, the Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services met 37 of the 113 required performance measures, did not meet at least 35 other areas, did not provide data on 18 areas, and could not validate data on another 23 commitments.



1,788 or 21%

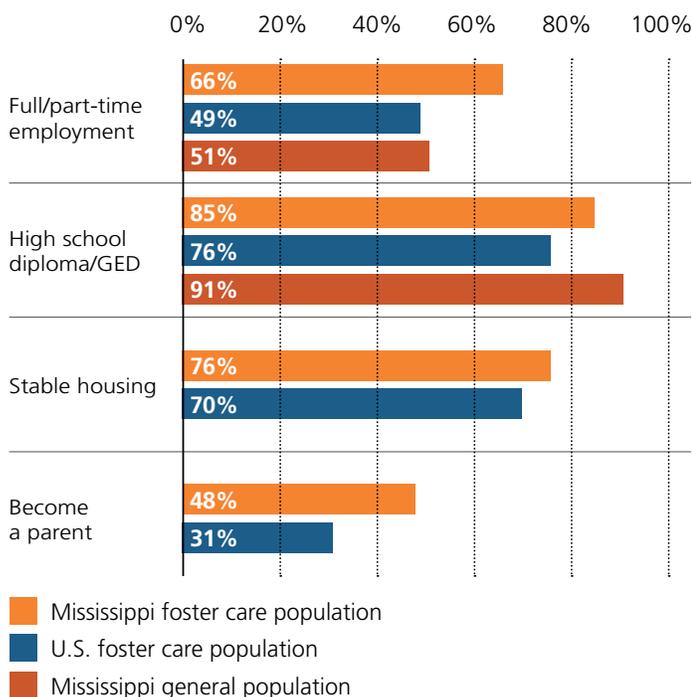
of youth in Mississippi's foster care system are ages 14 or older, compared to a national average of 25%

Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, [Fostering Youth Transitions Report](#)



Young Adult Outcomes by Age 21

Young adults who experience foster care tend to have worse outcomes than their peers in the general population across a variety of measures.



Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Fostering Youth Transitions Report*

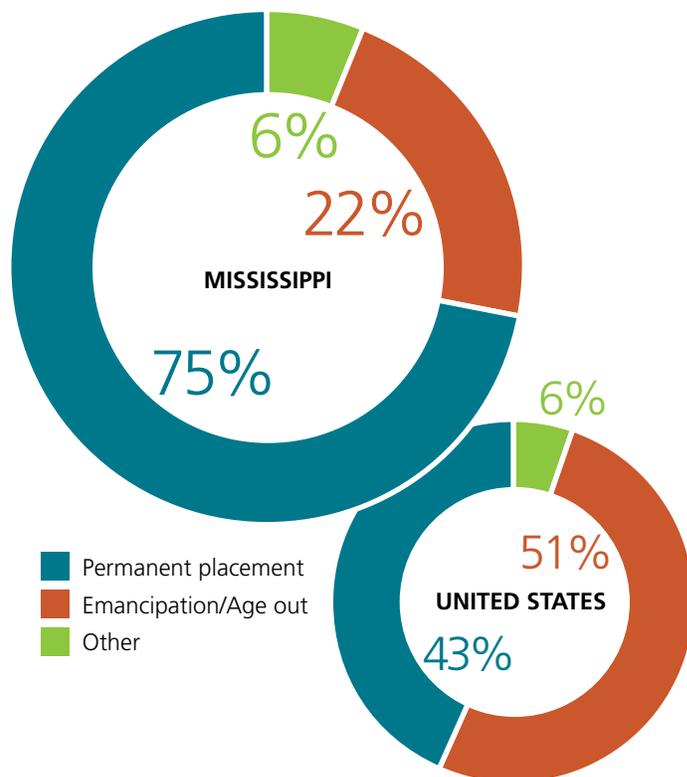
PLACEMENT STABILITY IN MISSISSIPPI

The Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services committed to limiting the number of placement disruptions for youth involved with the child welfare system, and to document why disruptions are necessary when they do occur. A [review](#) of kinship care placements published by the Campbell Collaboration concluded that “children in kinship care experience fewer placement disruptions and incidents of institutional abuse.” [Mississippi law](#) prioritizes placing a child with a relative when doing so is in the best interest of the child. It also provides for exceptions to the requirements of a separate bed, bedroom and a certain bedroom size.

EXTENDING FOSTER CARE BEYOND AGE 18

The Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services is [required](#) to provide some supports to youth beyond age 18, but it is state-

Reasons for Leaving Foster Care



Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Fostering Youth Transitions Report*

tiated and does not meet all requirements for full Title IV-E funding.

Twenty-eight states, the District of Columbia and nine Native American tribes have federally approved and reimbursable Title IV-E [extended foster care programs](#). These programs extend foster care up to age 21, providing the youth meet at least one of the following requirements: complete their secondary, postsecondary or vocational education, are employed for at least 80 hours a month, or are medically incapable of fulfilling any of the previous conditions. [Child Trends](#) examined national data, finding that youth in states that have extended foster care past age 18 generally have access to independent living services, such as housing assistance and financial management. They also experience better outcomes related to employment, high school diploma and GED completion, educational aid and homelessness.