

Serving Older Youth in Foster Care

Virginia 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 Virginia has adopted to better serve older youth in care, as well as additional strategies other states have implemented.

Foster Care in Virginia

More than 2,700 Virginia youth in foster care were over the age of 14 in 2018. This accounted for 35% of Virginia's foster care population. Virginia extended its foster care program to age 21 through its 2016 [appropriations bill](#). In 2017, the [Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission](#) directed its staff to study the foster care and adoption services delivered by Virginia's local departments of social services and supervised by the Virginia Department of Social Services. The committee completed its study in 2018 and made 34 [recommendations](#). Some of the recommendations included increasing kinship placements, establishing caseload standards for caseworkers, and addressing the needs of youth in foster care who are 14 or older.

EXTENDING FOSTER CARE BEYOND AGE 18

Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell in 2013 proposed \$28 million in state and federal funding for new efforts to improve foster care and adoption. Three years later, the Virginia General Assembly authorized the [Fostering Futures](#) program, a voluntary program that extends foster care financial and social support services to age 21.



2,704 or 35%

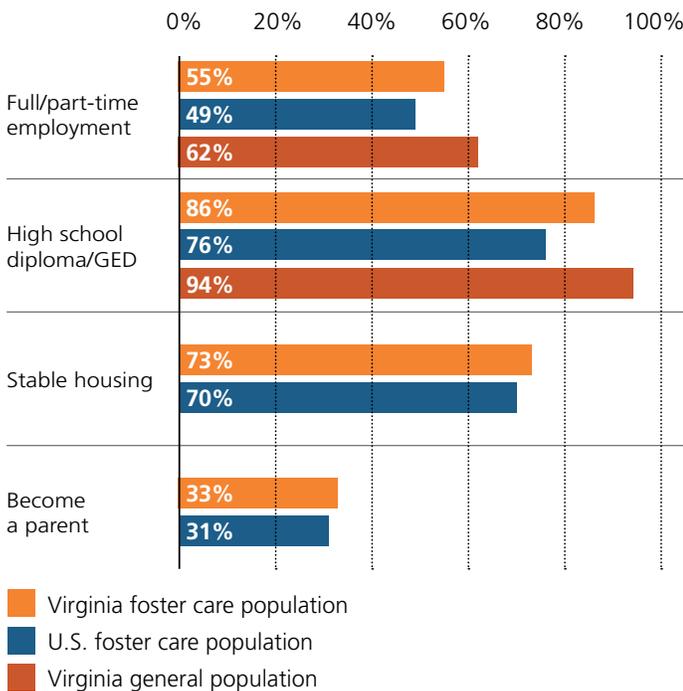
of youth in Virginia's foster care system are ages 14 or older, compared to a national average of 25%

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.



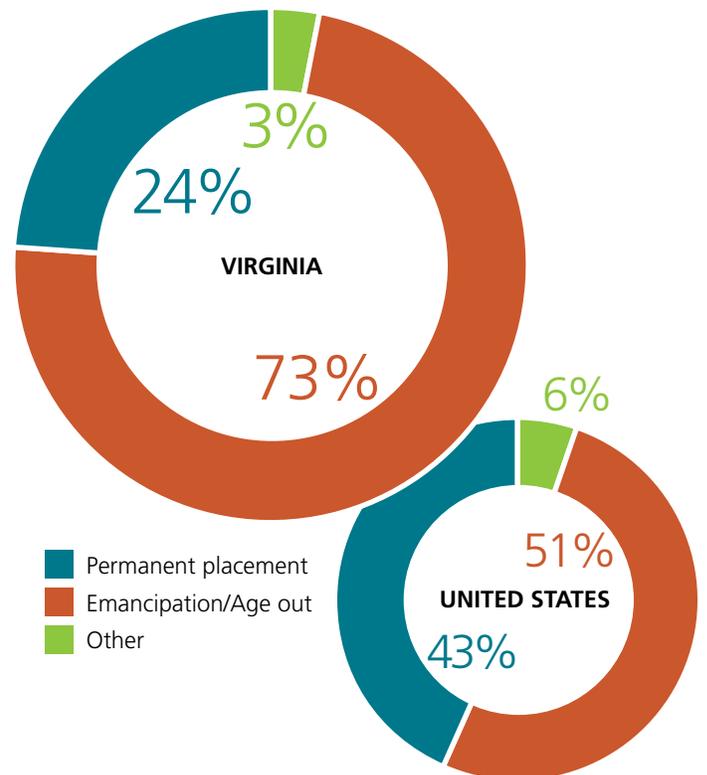
Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Fostering Youth Transitions Report*

To be **eligible**, youth must be under 21 and in permanent foster care or in the custody of Virginia’s Department of Social Services, or they must have been involved with the state’s foster care system prior to being released from the Department of Juvenile Justice. In addition, the youth must be employed or making progress in an educational, vocational, treatment or training program. Youth may reenter the Fostering Futures program multiple times as long as they meet the eligibility requirements. A transition plan is provided to youth in their Voluntary Continuing Services and Support Agreement. The plan details the services for which youth are eligible and how maintenance payments are distributed. In 2018, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago studied a similar program in California. The **study** concluded that extended foster care in California was associated with decreased homelessness and increased lengths of employment for youth involved in the state’s extended foster care program.

INCREASING PLACEMENT STABILITY WITH KINSHIP CARE PLACEMENTS AND RELATIVE SEARCHES

The Campbell Collaboration published a **review** of kinship care placements in 2014 and concluded that “children in kinship care experience fewer placement disruptions and incidents of institu-

Reasons for Leaving Foster Care



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

tional abuse.” Virginia’s Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission’s 2018 report recommended that Virginia create a state-funded Guardianship Assistance Program (**GAP**) that waives the requirement for potential guardians to serve as licensed foster parents. GAP is a federally reimbursable program that can increase placement stability by placing youth with relatives and providing financial support and services. If Virginia were to create a program that waived the licensing requirement, the program would not be eligible for the federal reimbursement. Instead, the legislature created a federally reimbursable GAP with **SB 636** and **HB 1333** that still requires relative guardians to serve as licensed foster parents. Virginia statute also instructs local social service boards to **first seek** out kinship placement to keep children out of foster care.

The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges’ **Enhanced Resource Guidelines** recommends that courts be involved with overseeing child welfare agencies’ attempts to locate relatives for kinship placements. Looking across the country, **California, Pennsylvania** and other states explicitly require the courts to review their child welfare agency’s efforts to locate a relative before placing a youth in long-term foster care.



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