

Achieving the Vision of Extended Foster Care

SUMMARY

California was among the first states to opt into a federal opportunity to create an Extended Foster Care (EFC) program in 2010, serving foster youth ages 18-21. The EFC Program represented a historic expansion of services to foster youth, intended to address the poor outcomes faced by youth as they emancipate from the foster care system at age 18. These negative outcomes included a higher incidence of incarceration, reliance on public benefits, homelessness and poverty.

Nine years later, the vision of the EFC Program is yet to be achieved. Participation rates in the EFC Program are much higher than originally anticipated. While this is a positive sign that young adults welcome the additional assistance from the foster care system, it has overwhelmed the counties' capacity to meet the needs of all young adults in care. California's high housing costs, coupled with youth who are unprepared for our state's tight housing market, has led to housing instability and homelessness. These two elements – county child welfare workload and housing instability - have significantly hindered foster youth's pursuit of higher education, meaningful employment, and self-sufficiency as they transition to adulthood.

ISSUE

Nearly ten years into implementation of Extended Foster Care, it is clear that we must invest in increased (1) child welfare worker capacity and (2) housing availability and supports to ensure that all of the young people that want to participate in the EFC program can take full advantage of the program in order to improve outcomes and set them on a path to a positive transition out of care. In Chapin Hall's recent CalYouth study, over 35 percent of youth reported they experienced homelessness while actively enrolled in extended foster care. Social workers with increasing caseloads lack the time to support the youth as they transition to adulthood.

The primary purposes of extended foster care is to prepare the youth for their successful transition into adulthood. However, without sufficient supports from skilled social workers and lacking appropriate housing, the vision of extended foster care is falling flat. Failure to support youth while they are in

Extended Foster Care results in increased chronic homelessness and disconnection as adults, which further traumatizes these young adults at a critical time in their young lives when they need security and stability to succeed.

PROPOSAL

In order to ensure that all non-minor dependents in foster care can access and stabilize in housing the state must:

- Develop **housing navigators** to aid young adults in locating and securing appropriate housing and support their transition to independence;
- Require counties to **examine and report** on their ability to meet the housing needs of youth who are in extended foster care, taking specific account of how they will address the short-term, immediate housing needs of these youth;
- Develop capacity to meet the **immediate housing needs** of young adults who are re-entering extended foster care or who are moving to a new placement;
- Promote placement stability by requiring counties to **“hold” placements for up to 14 days** if the non-minor dependent has provided notice of intent to return within 14 days or the program has reason to believe the youth will be returning;
- Reduce barriers and increase the quality of independent SILP placements by allowing for a **streamlined approval process** and the creation of a listing of appropriate rooms for rent;
- Promote placement stability and transition to independence by **restructuring the host family transitional housing model** to allow families already licensed as a resource family to be eligible to serve as a host family and to divide the THP payment between the caregiver, young adult and provider.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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