

ELIMINATING THE FOSTER CARE TO HOMELESSNESS PIPELINE

Anna Rose Thelemaque

RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY

To eliminate the foster care to homelessness pipeline, Congress should (1) ensure every young person up to age 26 has access to affordable, stable housing after exiting the foster care system; (2) create a universal screening program for housing assistance and require it be incorporated into mandatory transition planning for all young people leaving foster care to ensure no young person leaves foster care to homelessness; and (3) establish a Demonstration Program that seeks to forge public/private partnerships between child welfare agencies and landlords/management firms that would agree to hold a specific percentage of housing stock available for young people leaving foster care.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Homelessness is one of the most serious issues that many foster youth experience with twenty percent of foster youth becoming homeless the day they age out of care (Finally Family Homes, 2022). With no single, streamlined system of housing supports for youth transitioning out of foster care into adulthood and no entitlement to room and board while in foster care, it is imperative to expand the existing supports in place to ensure that no foster youth exits care into homelessness and has consistent, stable housing through age 26.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Throughout my experience in foster care, I was moved from three different homes that were all not secure and felt unsafe. When I aged out of foster care, I began college and had no choice but to live on campus. For one of the first times in my life, living on campus allowed me to be in my own safe environment after years of living in foster care. But after my first semester, COVID-19 swept the country and housing insecurity hit me hard. Like many other students across the country, I was forced to leave my dorm, but unlike most of them, I knew I had no "home" to return to.

When I was no longer allowed to live on campus, I sought help from a variety of resources. However, most were unable to provide me with a consistent place to live which resulted in a lengthy period of couch surfing.

PERSONAL REFLECTION (CONTINUED)

I was then told I qualified for the Foster Youth to Independence housing voucher. The voucher should have taken about ninety days to obtain, but took six months plus another three for a landlord to accept it. After three years of dealing with housing insecurity, I finally moved into my first permanent apartment just a week before starting the CCAI summer internship.

While my experience with homelessness may have first been a condition of the pandemic, former foster youth face similar experiences every day. Agencies do not provide adequate housing assistance for foster youth in situations like mine, underscoring the need to have a more robust, guaranteed system of housing support for students and young people who have aged out of the foster care system.

THE PROBLEM & CURRENT LAW

Each year, more than 20,000 youth in foster care turn 18 years old and are expected to start their lives on their own – looking for a job, a place to live, food to eat, and other basic necessities to survive all at once. The transition from foster care often places young people at risk of homelessness and housing instability due to the loss of support the child welfare system should provide.

Twenty percent of foster youth will become homeless the day they age out of care. That means that of the 20,000 who age out each year, approximately 4,000 leave foster care directly into homelessness (Finally Family Homes, 2022). Involvement in the child welfare system is a major predictor for future homelessness; nationwide, 50 percent of the homeless population has spent time in foster care during their life (National Foster Youth Institute, 2021). Often, youth in the foster care system have lived through multiple traumas and disruptive events by the time they begin their transition to adulthood. This can include abuse and/or neglect, multiple foster home placements, lack of continuity in education, and an array of losses of relationships (e.g., friends, family, and/or siblings). These challenges impact the emotional and social development of foster care youth as they transition into adulthood ("Young Adults," n.d.).



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THE PROBLEM & CURRENT LAW (*CONTINUED*)

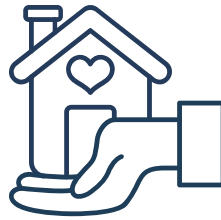
Although there is a dedicated system of federal housing support for youth transitioning out of foster care, there is no uniform entitlement for housing support consistent with an entitlement to room and board while in foster care. This means that the majority of youth aging out of care without stable housing are competing for the same limited pot of resources and services that support the entire population of individuals experiencing homelessness.

The Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Act of 2019 made access to Family Unification Vouchers (FUP vouchers) “on-demand” to foster youth who are at risk of homelessness as they transition to adulthood without familial support, ideally making it easier to serve foster youth anywhere they live. Through this new Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) program, Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) assistance was made available to Public Health Authorities (PHA) in partnership with public child welfare agencies. Under the FYI program, “PHAs provide housing assistance on behalf of: youth at least 18 years and not more than 24 years of age (have not reached their 25th birthday) who left foster care, or will leave foster care within 90 days, in accordance with a transition plan described in Section 475(5)(H) of the Social Security Act, and are homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless at age 16 or older” (“S.2803,” 2019). This program extended a foster youth’s Family Unification Program (FUP) voucher for up to an additional 24 months as they work toward self-sufficiency, including by participating in a Family Self Sufficiency program.

There is also some funding for housing support available to former foster youth through the John H. Chafee Foster Care for Successful Transition to Adulthood Program (Chafee). The Chafee program provides funding for states, territories, and Indian tribal entities (states) to assist youth in foster care and young adults formerly in foster care with services and financial assistance to promote their transition to adulthood. This includes housing support as well as help with education, employment, financial management, emotional support, and assured connections to caring adults for older youth in foster care (Fernandez-Alcantara, 2019). Still, Chafee funding is limited – \$143 million annually to be distributed across the states – and states can only spend 30 percent of their Chafee dollars on housing.



*young adults **age out of** foster care every year in the United States.*



of young adults aging out of foster care enter homelessness.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To eliminate the foster care to homelessness pipeline, Congress should:

- **Ensure every young person up to age 26 has access to affordable, stable housing after exiting the foster care system** by expanding the foster youth to independence program (FYI) which provides housing choice vouchers for up to 36 months to young people who have experienced foster care and are at risk of homelessness or already homeless.
- **Limit the universal screening program for housing assistance by requiring that the FYI vouchers become part of a mandatory transition planning for all young people leaving foster care** to ensure no young person leaves foster care to homelessness. This screening would be done by a social worker with in-depth knowledge of housing supports for young people and would provide support to the young person up to age 26 to ensure they have housing stability for the period of time after exiting foster care.
- **Establish a Demonstration Program that seeks to forge public/private partnerships between child welfare agencies and landlords/management firms** that would agree to hold a specific percentage of housing stock available for young people leaving foster care.

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