

# Young Adult Homelessness: Options to Improve Employment and Housing Security

Finding employment and housing are major milestones in the transition to adulthood, and for the one in 10 adults ages 18-25 who experience [homelessness](#) each year, they can be difficult goals to achieve. Young adults exiting foster care or incarceration face [additional challenges](#) that make it difficult to meet their basic needs, including barriers to education and health care. State lawmakers have policy options to help young adults create pathways to self-sufficiency, prevent homelessness and improve opportunities to thrive in work and life.

## 5 Things to Know About Young Adults and Homelessness

- 1** **Prior involvement with juvenile justice and foster care increases the risk of homelessness for young adults.** Nearly [one-third](#) of young adults experiencing homelessness have been in foster care and nearly half have been in juvenile detention, jail or prison. Many consider these experiences to be the beginning of their homelessness.
- 2** **Education is crucial for young adults to obtain employment, build financial independence and secure stable housing.** The lack of a GED or high school diploma is the [greatest single risk factor](#) for homelessness. Youth without a diploma or GED are 4.5 times more likely to experience homelessness than those who complete high school.
- 3** **Young adults experiencing homelessness often do not have access to their Social Security card, birth certificate or other vital records, which creates barriers to obtaining stable housing and employment.** [Without identification documents](#), young adults cannot sign a lease, purchase car insurance or complete wage and tax documents.
- 4** **Low wages and underemployment contribute to the inability of young adults to maintain housing security.** Nearly [45% of workers](#) earning the federal minimum wage or less are under 25 years old. The value of the federal minimum wage is at its [lowest point](#) in 66 years, and rent costs are [outpacing wages](#) in nearly every state.
- 5** **Young adults in rural and nonrural areas experience homelessness at similar rates, but their experiences are different.** Young adults in metropolitan areas are more likely to attend school and to be employed than those in rural communities. Access to supportive services, [particularly health care](#), is often more limited in rural areas, which can compound unemployment and housing insecurity.

# 5 Options to Help Prevent Young Adult Homelessness

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## **Increase housing options for youth experiencing homelessness, particularly those previously involved with foster care or juvenile justice.**

- **Colorado SB 82** (2023) established the Fostering Success Voucher Program to provide housing vouchers and case management services to young adults ages 18-26 who are experiencing homelessness and have prior involvement in foster care or kinship care.
  - **Virginia HB 349** (2022) requires local departments of social services to provide housing supports for up to six months to young adults ages 18-21 who turned 18 while in foster care or while in the custody of the Department of Juvenile Justice.
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## **Create opportunities for young adults to continue their education and participate in workforce development programs.**

- **Iowa SF 318** (2023) created an Office of Apprenticeships to establish rules and quality standards for pre-apprenticeships and youth apprenticeships.
  - **Maine SP 424** (2021) aims to increase high school graduation rates for students experiencing housing instability or education disruption through mentorships, course credit waivers and flexibility in diploma requirements.
  - **Maryland SB 551** (2023) equips young adults disconnected from school and/or work with mentoring, job training and financial literacy skills through the state Service Year Option Pathway Program.
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## **Expand access to identification and vital records to ensure young adults have the necessary documentation to obtain employment and housing.**

- **Alabama HB 385** (2022) exempts youth and young adults experiencing homelessness from certain fees associated with obtaining a driver's license.
  - **Florida HB 1577** (2022) waives all fees for birth certificates for unaccompanied homeless youths and young adults who are or were at the time of their 18th birthday in the custody of the Department of Children and Families or Department of Juvenile Justice.
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## **Promote economic self-sufficiency and housing security by raising state minimum wages or offering direct financial assistance to vulnerable young adults.**

- **California AB 172** (2021) administers a [guaranteed income pilot program](#) to provide unconditional cash payments for basic needs and prioritizes young adults who have aged out of the extended foster care program.
  - **New Mexico SB 437** (2019) raised the state's hourly minimum wage to \$12 and established a training wage for high school students.
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## **Develop and fund programs that improve health outcomes, stabilize housing and promote employment opportunities for young adults experiencing homelessness in rural areas.**

- **Minnesota HF 2900** (2023) created a grant program to fund intensive treatment and support for adolescents and young adults experiencing or at risk of experiencing an emerging mood disorder. Providers must ensure access for rural residents and can use funds for housing and travel expenses for people receiving services or to address other barriers.