

CHILD WELFARE FACT SHEET

May 2017 Update

FOCUS ON RESTORING FOSTER CARE TO AGE 21

Rhode Island provided foster care services until age 21 until July 1, 2007, when the upper age limit that youth could remain in foster care was lowered to age 18. (Youth with serious emotional disturbances, autism, or functional developmental disabilities remain legally entitled to services until age 21).¹ Since then, youth aging out have been able to access some aftercare services through the Young Adults Establishing Self-Sufficiency (YESS) program. While YESS offers important and effective supports for youth who participate, *all* youth would be eligible for more

comprehensive services if the age was restored to age 21.

An estimated 388 Rhode Island youth ages 18 to 21 would be eligible for services if the upper age limit for foster care services was returned to 21. (This estimate does not include youth in the juvenile justice system, who can remain under Family Court jurisdiction and receive services until age 19).^{2,3}

A growing number of states have extended foster care services beyond age 18, a policy that can have substantial individual, societal and economic benefits.^{4,5,6} Currently, 25 states and DC provide foster care services to youth until age 21.⁷

THE 2017 YOUNG ADULT VOLUNTARY EXTENSION OF CARE ACT (H-5807 & S-0669)

The *Young Adult Voluntary Extension of Care Act* would restore extended foster care services to youth age 18 to age 21. It would provide young adults ages 18 to 21, formerly in the care of DCYF, access to a full array of services including case management, permanency supports, educational and vocational services, physical/mental health care, and a range of placement and housing options.^{8,9}

This voluntary program would ensure that services for older foster youth are reflective of the young adult's autonomy, developmentally appropriate, and tailored to meet the specific needs of youth transitioning to independence and adulthood. Rhode Island could see higher rates of high school and college completion, employment, and earnings and lower healthcare costs among young people.¹⁰

COST-BENEFIT OF EXTENDING CARE TO AGE 21

Youth who age out of foster care fare poorly in employment, educational attainment, access to health care, housing safety and stability, and criminal justice system involvement when compared to the general population.^{11,12} Often lacking stable connections to parents, family members, or other caring adults, they are often left to negotiate the transition to adulthood with few supports.¹³ Evidence shows that the benefits of extending foster care to age 21 outweigh the costs to states, because of the following:^{14,15,16,17}

- **Increased Educational Attainment:** Youth who remain in foster care until age 21 are more likely to graduate high school or complete their GED and more likely to pursue post-secondary education than those discharged at age 18.^{18,19}

- **Higher Earnings:** Youth who remain in foster care until age 21 have higher lifetime earnings than those who age out at age 18.^{20,21}

- **Decreased Utilization of Public Assistance:** Youth who remain in foster care until age 21 use fewer public assistance programs (such as SNAP, SSI, and/or TANF) than youth who age out of care at age 18.^{22,23}

- **Reduced Rate of Criminal Justice Involvement:** With 30%-40% of former foster youth arrested within a few years of leaving care, extending the age can lower arrest and incarceration rates, which results in fewer crime victims, reduced criminal justice costs, and improved employment prospects for former foster youth.^{24,25}

FEDERAL SUPPORT FOR EXTENDING FOSTER CARE

The *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (Fostering Connections Act)* provides federal support to states who invest in extending foster care to age 21. Prior to this provision, which went into effect on October 1, 2010, federal foster care reimbursement (through Title IV-E of the federal Social Security Act) was limited to youth under age 18.²⁶

~~Two states that have formal extension of foster care programs and draw down reimbursement from Title IV-E to offset costs to the state are Nebraska and North Carolina.²⁷~~

To be eligible for federal reimbursement under *Fostering Connections Act*, youth must meet at least one of these conditions:

- Completing secondary education or a program leading to an equivalent credential
- Enrolled in an institution that provides postsecondary or vocational education
- Participating in a program or activity designed to promote or remove barriers to employment
- Employed for at least 80 hours per month
- Incapable of doing any of the activities described above due to a medical condition.²⁸

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Restore foster care services to age 21 in Rhode Island.
- Ensure that DCYF has the financial resources to provide older foster youth ages 18 to 21 with the tailored array of services and supports required to ensure successful transitions to adulthood including case management, permanency supports, educational, vocational, and career services, physical/mental health care, and a range of housing options.
- Ensure that the Rhode Island Family Court has continued oversight of foster youth until age 21 so that the court may ensure that older youth receive supports and services to help them move towards independence, based on their transition plan.
- Reduce the number of youth exiting DCYF without permanency and eliminate racial and ethnic disparities at all points in the child welfare system.

References

¹ *Services to youth ages 18-21: Q and A*. (2007). Providence, RI: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families.

² Rhode Island General Laws, Section 14-1-6.

³ Rhode Island KIDS COUNT analysis of Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families data.

⁴ Cooper, H., Jordan, E. & McCoy-Roth, M. (2013). Older youth and the Fostering Connections Act. In *Perspectives on Fostering Connections: A series of white papers on the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (30-35)*. The FosteringConnections.org Project.

⁵ *Success beyond 18: Frequently asked questions*. (n.d.). Retrieved May 12, 2017, from www.jimcaseyouth.org

^{6,14,18,21,23} Peters, C. M., Dworsky, A., Courtney, M. E. & Pollack, H. (2009). *Extending foster care to age 21: Weighing the costs to government against the benefits to youth*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

^{7,22} Juvenile Law Center, May 12, 2017.

⁸ Rhode Island General Assembly. H-5807 proposed at the time of publication. Regular Session (2017).

⁹ Rhode Island General Assembly. S-0669 proposed at the time of publication. Regular Session: (2017).

¹⁰ *Aging out of foster care in America*. (n.d.). Retrieved May 12, 2017, from www.aecf.org

¹¹ Courtney, M. E., Dworsky, A., Lee, J. & Rapp, M. (2010). *Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Outcomes at age 23 and 24*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

^{12,17} *Supporting youth in foster care: Research-based policy recommendations for executive and legislative officials in 2017*. (2017). Washington D.C.: Child Trends.

^{13,15,25} *Cost avoidance: The business case for investing in youth aging out of foster care*. (2013). St. Louis, MO: Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative.

^{16,19,20,22,24} *Extending foster care to age 21: Measuring costs and benefits in Washington State*. (2010). Olympia, WA: Washington State Institute for Public Policy.

^{26,28} *A guide to support the implementation of foster care beyond 18: Questions & answers, summary of federal Fostering Connections guidance and perspectives from the field*. (2014). St. Louis, MO: Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, Success Beyond 18.



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