



CHILDREN NOW



February 19, 2019

To: The Honorable Dr. Richard Pan
Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3

Honorable Members
Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3

From: Angie Schwartz, Policy Director, Alliance for Children's Rights
Susanna Kniffen, Senior Director, Child Welfare Policy, Children NOW
Frank J. Mecca, Executive Director, CWDA
Tia Orr, Director of Governmental Affairs, Service Employees International Union (SEIU) California

RE: CHILD WELFARE SERVICES – HOUSING AND RELATED SUPPORTS IN THE EXTENDED FOSTER CARE PROGRAM

The Alliance for Children's Rights, Children NOW, County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA), and Service Employees International Union (SEIU) California, respectfully request your support for a \$50 million General Fund (GF) investment to support transition-aged foster youth and young adults participating in the Extended Foster Care (EFC) Program. Our request includes the following components:

- \$32.9 million GF to enable county caseworkers to better support youth who opt into the EFC program.
- \$10.2 million GF for Housing Navigators to help young adults in EFC find and keep housing.
- \$2 million GF for housing-related financial assistance such as security deposits and utility payments
- \$4.9 million GF to support foster homes transitioning to become host families for youth in EFC.

Background – EFC Yields Early Success

Nearly a decade ago, California was among the first states to opt into a federal opportunity to create an EFC Program, serving foster youth ages 18 through 21. The EFC Program was created by AB 12 (Chapter 559, Statutes of 2010) and represented a historic expansion of services to foster youth, intended to improve outcomes for youth, who often faced enormous challenges as they emancipated from the foster care system at age 18 prior to the creation of EFC, often leading to poverty, homelessness and incarceration.

Research on the EFC Program has found numerous benefits for participating young adults, including improvements in education, employment, housing, and social support, and reductions in pregnancy and parenting and criminal justice system involvement. This research, part of the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study (CaLYOUTH), found that each additional year in EFC increased the probability of foster youth enrolling in college by 10-11% and increased the number of quarters that foster youth were employed between their 18th and 21st birthdays.¹

The CaLYOUTH study also found that most foster youth under age 18 chose to take advantage and remain in foster care, with three-quarters entering the EFC Program after age 18, and two-thirds remaining in care up to age 21. This demonstrates that the services and supports of the EFC Program are valued and needed by these young adults as they exit the foster care system.

Desired Outcomes Not Fully Realized

Nine years after the passage of AB 12, the vision of the EFC Program is yet to be fully realized. The CaLYOUTH Study also acknowledged that many young adults still fare poorly when compared to their same-age peers across many domains, including economic self-sufficiency, physical and mental health, and educational attainment. The study noted that more work can and should be done to support transition-aged youth.

Two challenges in particular have strained the EFC Program's resources, neither of which was anticipated in the original legislation and funding decisions:

- 1) Participation rates in the EFC Program are much higher than originally anticipated. As of October 1, 2018, there were 8,374 young adults in the EFC Program, served by both child welfare and probation systems. 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. Social workers with increasing caseloads lack the time to support the youth as they transition to adulthood, especially in helping these young adults secure needed housing.

- 2) California's increasingly high housing costs, coupled with youth who are unprepared for our state's tight housing market, has led to housing instability and, too often, homelessness for transition-aged youth. The CaLYOUTH Study found that nearly 20 percent of youth surveyed reported they experienced homelessness between age 18 and 21, and 36 percent reported "couch surfing" at some point while actively enrolled in extended foster care. Increasing rental costs coupled with low vacancy rates in many urban areas make it increasingly difficult for young adults to navigate the housing market and secure needed housing. Approximately 41 percent of youth in EFC (CWS and Probation) utilize

¹ Courtney, M. E., Okpych, N. J., Park, K., Harty, J., Feng, H., Torres-Garcia, A., & Sayed, S. (2018). *Findings from the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study (CaLYOUTH): Conditions of youth at age 21*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

the Supervised Independent Living Placement (SILP) option, which enables youth to live independently in an apartment or other housing of their choice. These youth receive a modest payment to cover all board and care expenses, including the cost of housing.² Currently, young adults must find and secure a SILP on their own, receiving very little assistance from the child welfare program, and as one can imagine, this has been challenging in today's housing market.

These two elements – county child welfare workload and housing instability - have significantly hindered foster youth's pursuit of higher education, meaningful employment, stability in their relationships, and self-sufficiency as they transition to adulthood. The primary purpose of extended foster care is to prepare the youth for their successful transition into adulthood. However, without stable housing or sufficient supports from skilled social workers, the vision of extended foster care is falling short of our hopes for these young adults. Failure to support youth while they are in EFC results in increased chronic homelessness and disconnection as adults, which further traumatizes these young adults at a critical time. They need security and stability to succeed.

Areas of Needed Investment to Achieve the Vision of EFC

Nearly ten years into implementation of the EFC Program, it is clear that we must invest in increased child welfare worker capacity and 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 foster care. Specifically, the following are necessary:

- 1) **Caseload Reduction:** A \$32.9 million GF investment in child welfare worker capacity will allow social workers to attend to the individual and complex needs of young adults in the EFC Program. These young adults have often been in foster care for many years and continue to struggle on their own path to healing as adults. Research shows that lower caseloads allow social workers to give additional time and attention to supporting youth in care, and lead to improved outcomes for foster youth.³

- 2) **Housing Navigators and Financial Assistance:** A total of \$12.2 million GF (including \$10.2 million for Housing Navigators and \$2 million for limited-term financial assistance) will link transition-aged foster youth and non-minor dependents in the EFC Program to housing including SILPs, Transitional Housing, and placements with resource families, as determined appropriate and based on an assessment of the youth. These housing navigators will work with case managers to identify available housing units, match youth with other foster youth for shared housing, develop a repository of housing units for use by foster youth, assist young adults with lease agreements, help resolve disputes with

² Currently equal to the basic foster care rate of \$960 per month.

³ SB 2030 Workload Study: <https://www.cwda.org/publication/child-welfare-services-workload-studies>

landlords, and provide other services as needed. In addition, time-limited housing assistance will be available for expenses such as security deposits and some basic furnishings.

- 3) **Increasing Foster Care Capacity:** An additional \$4.9 million GF will enable foster youth who are living in a foster home to maintain placement with the resource family, by creating a path for the resource family to transition seamlessly to a “host family,” a type of transitional housing provider authorized under the Transitional Housing Provider (THP) Plus-FC Program.

Our Coalition is also in process of finalizing Trailer Bill Language (TBL) to implement the above needed supports and services. The proposed TBL will also address options for securing emergency housing for non-minor dependents who are awaiting a more stable living arrangement.

California must continue to build on the successes of the EFC Program so that young adults in the foster care system have every chance to heal and thrive.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

- cc: Mareva Brown, Office of the Senate President Pro Tempore
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