

April 17, 2020

The Honorable Chuck Grassley
U.S. Senate
135 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ron Wyden
U.S. Senate
221 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Danny Davis
U.S. House of Representatives
2159 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jackie Walorski
U.S. House of Representatives
419 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Recommended Provisions to Help Older Youth in and Aging Out of Foster Care in Response to the COVID-19 Crisis

Dear Chairman Grassley, Ranking Member Wyden, Chairman Davis, and Ranking Member Walorski:

We write to you as advocates of youth in and aging out of the foster care system. These teens and young adults are some of our most vulnerable citizens, particularly during this national emergency. They are being disconnected from work, school, and external support systems. Lacking family support, they are at risk of losing housing, and even their lives. While several states have taken action to respond to the needs of older youth in foster care, the scope of the problem and need to reach youth in every state requires federal action.

We ask you take action to ensure their safety and well-being in the next COVID-19 relief bill. You have the opportunity to provide a real safety net for these young people, who previously looked to the government as the only parent they had. **We ask you to include the following reforms in the next COVID-19 bill to help meet the needs of youth in foster care.** The attached fact sheet provides more details about how each of these reforms will help meet the needs of youth in and leaving the foster care system.

1. Increase Chafee Funding by 500 Million.

Funds from the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood can pay for the vital resources and services that young people need immediately and urgently, but has remained at \$140 million since its enactment in 1999 and only increased to \$143 million this year. Providing a well overdue increase in funding for Chafee will allow states to meaningfully meet the immediate needs of youth and young adults during this crisis and help support them as they plan for their future past the COVID-19 crisis.

2. Extend the Age of Eligibility for Chafee Aftercare Services to Age 23 for All Youth.

Flexible Chafee funds can be used to meet many of the immediate needs of young people who are still making the transition to adulthood. These funds can help with immediate needs for housing, food, and other service supports that are so vital at this time. Congress has acknowledged the wisdom of providing these services to youth until age 23. Youth in all states should have the benefit of this opportunity for support.

3. **Suspend Participation Requirements for Young People in Extended Foster Care.**

Suspending the work, school, and program participation requirements for youth in extended foster care will allow youth to remain safe, healthy, and housed. This action will allow them to continue to receive placement and support services through the COVID-19 crisis so they can stay on track to meet their goals. Without this action, many youth may be pushed out of the system to homelessness and unsafe situation where their health will be at great risk.

4. **Place a Moratorium on Discharges from the Foster Care System for Youth Ages 18-21.**

By providing young people the safety and security of maintaining their current living arrangements and services, they will be in the best position to stay healthy and continue working towards their goals for their future. This additional time and support will help young people and child welfare agencies be able to appropriately plan for a successful transition out of care and into adulthood.

5. **Allow States to Draw Down Title IV-E funds until a Young Person Reaches Age 22.**

By allowing states to draw down Title IV-E funds after a young person reaches age 21, states will be encouraged to provide continued services for youth in his time of great need. This will help ensure that young people are not cut off from housing and services when they need it the most. It will also ensure that states have the capacity and funds to meet their needs.

Thank you for considering our request that you take action to help youth in and leaving foster care. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Annie Blackledge, **The Mockingbird Society**

Celeste Bodner, **FosterClub**

Sixto Cancel, **Think of Us**

Alexandra Citrin, **Center for the Study of Social Policy**

Serita Cox, **iFoster**

April Curtis, **Foster Care Alumni of America**

Lisa Dickson & Doris Edelmann, **ACTION Ohio**

Christen Glickman, **Youth Villages**

Jessica Haspel, **Children Now**

Amy Harfield & Melanie Delgado, **Children's Advocacy Institute**

Sherry Lachman, **Foster America**

Amy Lemley & Anna Johnson, **John Burton Advocates for Youth**

Laurie Lippold, **Partners for Our Children**

Jenny Pokempner, **Juvenile Law Center**

Jennifer Rodriguez, **Youth Law Center**

Sandy Santana, **Children's Rights**

John Sciamanna & Shaquita Ogletree, **Child Welfare League of America**

Stefanie Sprow & Steven Olender, **Children's Defense Fund**

Leecia Welch, **National Center for Youth Law**

Ruth White, **National Center for Housing and Child Welfare**

Jackie Thu-Huong Wong, **GRACE**