

FOSTERING YOUTH TRANSITIONS 2023: POLICY ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS

The [Fostering Youth Transitions 2023](#) report shines a light on the urgent need for policy action to nurture family connections and create stronger supports for youth in and transitioning out of foster care.

Advocates can use this new data to urge federal policymakers to advance practical, grounded, youth-informed policies that improve outcomes for older youth in care through three policy approaches: **1) Prioritize Family Ties and Permanence**; **2) Invest In and Redesign Chafee**; and **3) Improve Extended Foster Care**. Below are specific talking points advocates can use for policymaker outreach.

POLICY ACTION TALKING POINTS

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's new report, "Fostering Youth Transitions 2023" lays bare the challenges and the opportunities for youth experiencing foster care across the country.

The latest data shines a light on the fact that the supportive services that are meant to help youth in foster care succeed on their journey to adulthood are underfunded, inaccessible, or fundamentally broken.

These findings are nothing short of an alarm bell that federal policymakers should heed as an urgent call to action. We encourage policymakers to take immediate action in three key areas.

#1

Prioritize family ties and permanent family connections to provide those lifelong relationships that youth need most to succeed

Findings from the Fostering Youth Transitions 2023 report show that we are severely failing to connect youth to family. Youth in well-supported family-based foster care are more likely to leave foster care to join a permanent family.

RECOMMENDED POLICY ACTION:

Federal policymakers should increase support for kinship placements and address the barriers that prevent youth in foster care from living with relatives or in family-based settings while in foster care. Federal policy also should build incentives to take best practice to scale and make youth engagement in permanency planning a practice norm.

SUPPORTING DATA POINTS:

- Permanency rates for teens and young adults ages 16 to 21 are **declining**.
- **Nearly half** of teens who are in foster care age out on their own, usually at age 18, without ever being connected to family in a permanent way.
- **One in four teens** in foster care have a foster care placement in a group setting, even though we know that youth in these settings are less likely to leave foster care to rejoin family in a permanent way.
- Youth in group placements are **less likely** to have strong relationships with supportive adults, which are important protective factors that promote youth mental health and success in school and work.

#2

Invest in and redesign Chafee to ensure youth in foster care are plugged in to supportive relationships and services

Congress created the Chafee program nearly 25 years ago specifically to help foster youth have the relationships and support they need to transition successfully to young adulthood. The vision of Chafee remains as important as ever, but the latest data show that the program is falling woefully short.

RECOMMENDED POLICY ACTION:

Policymakers should redesign Chafee to maximize the intended impact of the program by making family connections a priority; increasing the investment by at least \$100/year; giving states flexibility to serve youth and young adults up to age 26 (similar to ETV and Medicaid for foster youth); incentivizing agencies to offer community-based services that youth say are most important: peer delivered services, supportive relationships, direct financial assistance, access to driver's licenses and transportation, and help brokering access to housing, health and mental health services. To improve the effectiveness of Chafee services, federal policy should incentivize positive outcomes and increase the involvement of youth in continuous program improvement efforts, such as by requiring agencies to utilize a diversity of methods to obtain youth feedback.

SUPPORTING DATA POINTS:

- Chafee services are not reaching large numbers of eligible youth. **More than half of eligible youth** ages 14-21 never received a Chafee-funded service.
- **Only 1 in 4 eligible youth** received a Chafee-funded service (in 2021). These services can make a measurable difference in the lives of youth in foster care, but only if youth are connected to them.

#3

Improve extended foster care to provide the supportive services youth and young adults most need in young adulthood

Youth leaving foster care need safe and stable housing, assistance with school and work, and support in building healthy lifelong relationships. Motivated by youth-driven advocacy, Congress enacted legislation in 2008 giving states the option to receive federal reimbursement for extending foster care, adoption and guardianship assistance beyond age 18. Research on implementation shows that extended foster care is effective and a good investment. Even a small dose of extended foster care can drive better results for youth and young adults. Unfortunately, state participation is low.

RECOMMENDED POLICY ACTION:

Policymakers should implement reforms to maximize potential benefits by guiding states in designing more effective programs that young people will want to utilize; elevating the focus on permanency planning; ensuring that young people have safe and age-appropriate living settings; ensuring youth and young adult involvement in their case planning; and having caseworkers with specialized skills in supporting young adults. Policymakers also should improve access to extended care by removing eligibility criteria and eliminating the outdated income eligibility test for eligible youth, which appropriately balances the cost-sharing between states and the federal government.

SUPPORTING DATA POINTS:

- To date, **33 states**, including D.C., Puerto Rico and nine tribes provide federally reimbursable extended foster care.
- Despite the availability of federal reimbursement for extended foster care, participation is low. Nationally **only 22 percent of youth** in foster care on their 18th birthday are utilizing extended foster care options a year later.
- Extended foster care has **key benefits** for youth. Youth who participate, especially young people of color, have improved outcomes in educational attainment, employment and earnings.

The vision of bright futures for youth in foster care today is attainable and consistent with the vision set forth over twenty years ago when Congress enacted the Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood. **Now is the time for policymakers to take action and create journeys to success for all youth and young adults who experience foster care.**