

THE NEW DEAL TO END YOUTH HOMELESSNESS



CHILD &
FAMILY
WELL-BEING

INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW DEAL TO END YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

A Way Home America (AWHA) is working with young people to craft a national policy platform to transform how youth and young adults are supported in our society. Led by the demands of young people and Roadmap Towards Transformation backed by the nation's leading advocacy organizations, this New Deal to End Homelessness is the most comprehensive proposal of its kind. It will span five system-oriented pillars with an unflinching commitment to racial justice in each. The five pillars are:

1. **Housing Justice**
2. **Child and Family Well-Being Justice**
3. **Legal Systems Justice**
4. **Economic Justice**
5. **Immigration Justice**

ROADMAP TOWARDS TRANSFORMATION ¹

The New Deal is a national roadmap that radically reimagines the systems outlined in the five pillars. It builds on the hard-fought efforts already underway and reorients them toward justice for youth and young adults. Each pillar will outline three types of efforts, which can occur simultaneously in many cases:

- **Reform:** Immediate opportunities to reduce harm, improve access, and produce positive outcomes even while working within a system that is rooted in structural racism and bias against young people.
- **Transformative Edge of Reform:** Pushing the edge of what's possible under our current system by challenging power, listening to young adults, and removing barriers to transformation.
- **Transformation:** Reorienting our systems toward justice by redistributing the resources and the power young people need to thrive

These efforts help transform our *current state* to the *future or end state* we strive for within each pillar.

¹ Adapted from Steve Williams' Demand Everything: Lessons of the Transformative Organizing Model: http://www.rosalux-nyc.org/wp-content/files_mf/williams_transformative_organizing.pdf

REFORM TRANSFORMATIVE EDGE TRANSFORMATION



CHILD AND FAMILY WELL-BEING SYSTEM VS CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

Throughout this document, we will refer to a new concept of a child and family well-being system that:

- Centers children, youth, and family well-being;
- Is community-driven with a newly shaped and defined role for government;
- Is rooted in keeping families together and fully supporting kinship placements when a family cannot stay together; and
- Empowers youth to live independently with support when they choose.

We do not use the terminology of the child welfare system when talking about the future state and what we are driving toward because we hold the belief that the current system should no longer exist in its current form and should be re-imagined and re-centered around well-being for children and families. We also believe that the system should be co-led by community and government, with the role of government focused on child safety and empowering community-based organizations to support the well-being of community members. It is critical to restructure and limit the role of the

government in a transformed system due to the historical trauma it has inflicted on families through the child welfare system, particularly harming Black, Indigenous, Brown, and Queer communities.

PARTNERING WITH OTHER NATIONAL CHILD AND FAMILY WELL-BEING ADVOCATES

A Way Home America's New Deal to End Youth Homelessness focuses on the intersection between housing and the child welfare system as it directly impacts youth and young adults. We recognize that the transformation of the child welfare system towards a system rooted in justice and centered on child and family well-being will take more than the youth actions in this pillar. AWAH is committed to partnering and supporting other national advocates and organizations working to more broadly transform the system for all ages of children, youth, and families. We also recognize the many child welfare advocates fighting for a better system for youth and leading the way on some of the reform and transformation efforts discussed throughout the pillar. AWAH is committed to partnering and helping to build the coalition necessary to reach a future state rooted in justice.

CHILD AND FAMILY WELL-BEING JUSTICE PILLAR

Future State of a System Focused on Child and Family Well-Being:

A new system centering well-being and focusing on supporting families, including kinship networks and chosen family, in safely staying together, or providing safe alternatives of a youth's choice by:

- giving families access to economic resources such as universal basic income, universal health care, and affordable housing, paired with the supportive services needed to stay together and thrive;
- eliminating the need for foster care, by ensuring child removals are solely based on safety, are temporary, and youth are placed with safe family members, kinship networks, and/or chosen family;
- empowering youth to live independently, if they choose, with the supports and resources needed; and
- fully supporting youth that are transitioning out of the current child welfare system with housing, economic, and social supports to thrive throughout adulthood.

TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION 1:

Create a new front door to a transformed system focused on child and family well-being that:

- offers families and older youth direct and immediate access to economic resources and supportive services,
- centers the goal of keeping families safely together, and
- supports youth to live independently if they choose.

Current State of the Front Door to the Child Welfare System

- The front doors, or entry points, of most child welfare systems are primarily focused on investigating child abuse and neglect. Though child safety is critical to the mission of child welfare systems, they leave out many families who need assistance but whose cases do not rise to the legally defined level of neglect or abuse.

However, being unable to access subsequent support through the child welfare system often leads families to future investigations due to those needs going unmet, and determinations that they are cases of abuse or neglect as defined by law, though families sought support earlier.

- Although more child welfare systems around the country are contracting services with community-based organizations, the front door continues to be managed through government agencies that are deeply mistrusted by many Black, Brown, Indigenous, and LGBTQ communities based on histories of harm. Services that are contracted out are also predominantly going to large white-led nonprofits that do not have roots in communities of color.
- Structural racism is embedded in the policies, procedures, and workforce at the front door of the child welfare system, leading to fewer Black, Indigenous, and Brown families accessing voluntary supports and more Black, Indigenous, and Brown families being investigated. That same structural racism is built into the family court system leading to disproportionate rates of child removals and foster care placements.
- Native and Indigenous child welfare services are managed through a complex set of legislation and policies between multiple federal agencies and sovereign tribal nations, leading to a level of bureaucracy and discriminatory policies that directly contribute to a disproportionate number of Native and Indigenous children being removed from their parents' care, both on and off of Tribal lands.
- There continues to be limited state and federal funding for voluntary services and community-based support for families in need, including a lack of youth-centered family counseling and reconciliation services for LGBTQ youth. This contributes to a disproportionate number of LGBTQ youth in the child welfare system.
- School systems have little to no resources for youth and families who they identify as struggling and often must turn to the child welfare system for assistance. Doing so can trigger negative consequences for the youth and family, particularly for Black, Brown, Indigenous, and LGBTQ youth and their families.
- Older youth have little to no decision-making power in the types of services they access or the types of placement (family, kinship, foster care, or independence)

while in foster care. They report that the system is punitive, disempowering, and leaves them unprepared to navigate adulthood.

- Older youth cannot access supportive services or economic resources outside of their family unit. Leaving older youth no supported pathway to independence other than coming formally into the child welfare system often leads to foster care or group home placement as opposed to supported independence.

End State of the New Front Door to a System Rooted in Justice:

Youth are empowered in their choice to remain in their family or live independently with all the supports of their choice.

All families can access the resources and services they need in their communities to safely remain together and thrive.

All youth and young adults have access to the resources and services in their communities they need to safely live independently with support, if they choose to do so.

The Path to our End State of a New Front Door Rooted in Justice:

Front Door Reform Efforts

Reform efforts have attempted to mitigate the harm of the current front door of the child welfare system, offer alternatives to investigations, and respond to the economic needs of families and youth. The child welfare system has undergone several reform efforts that have had varying success in reducing harm to youth and families and increasing access to resources that assist families to stay intact.

However, these reforms still operate within the restrictive regulations of a system that is actively causing harm. Further, these efforts are often targeted to support families with small children and not accessible to older youth and their families.

Examples of Crisis Housing Reform Efforts:

- Alternative Response/Differential Response allows for an alternative to a formal investigation of child abuse/neglect and formal findings with family court, allowing instead for a family assessment and voluntary services to help the family remain together.** Many states have enacted legislation and programs to implement this strategy, giving thousands of families

access to critical supportive services including mental health, parenting supports, and child care. However, these programs are often under-resourced and cannot provide the types and depth of services families need. It is also underutilized by child welfare systems that are risk-averse and plagued by structural racism that leads to a disproportionate amount of Black, Indigenous, and Brown families being assigned to investigations instead of accessing the assessment route of differential response. It is also mostly used by families with younger children and does not often offer services to older youth and their families.

- Family Unification Program (FUP) vouchers, offer housing choice vouchers (section 8) to families with a housing need that are at risk of their children being removed or where housing is a barrier to being reunified with children who have been removed by the child welfare system.** When paired with the supportive services through the child welfare system, these vouchers have led to thousands of families remaining intact and reunifying. The vouchers are limited in number, with far too few to meet the national needs. The vouchers are disproportionately used to reunify children after they have been removed and the parent has been deemed to work hard enough and be worthy of the resources by the system, as opposed to prevention efforts to keep families together and not remove the children. The vouchers also lack a funding stream for supportive services after a child welfare case has been closed, leaving families with time-limited supports that do not always meet their needs.
- Specialty family courts, such as drug courts, that have specially trained judges and child welfare workers who understand that needs of parents in recovery from drugs and alcohol have led to higher rates of children remaining home and being safely reunified after removal due to abuse or neglect related to the parent's drug use. And family-centered treatment that allows for children to stay with parents in treatment.** These courts and treatment programs help to give access to supportive services such as treatment, case management, and parenting support. Most jurisdictions do not have access to funding for these specialty courts or treatment programs leading to far fewer around the country. They are also most often utilized by families with small children and not older youth and their families.
- Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) grants** are already funding community-based family



support services outside of the child welfare system that are available to any families who need or wish to access them. Unfortunately, CBCAP grants have been chronically underfunded, and thus their impact is small. This program is a critical tool for expanding the availability of voluntary community-based supportive services for families and young people to help them thrive and prevent system involvement.

5. **Legal proposals to increase the state's burden for the removal of a child from their family.** Several states around the country have introduced legislation to increase the state's (child welfare system) level of burden for removal of a child, helping to ensure that the child is being removed for safety issues and not for an issue that could be addressed by offering services and assistance to the family.

Front Door Efforts on the Transformative Edge of Reform

States and counties have also attempted to imagine a new way of operating child welfare systems by pushing beyond the current regulatory and funding barriers that plague the system. These efforts have brought the system to the edge of transformation but have not been implemented to scale or in a way that has transformed the system.

Examples of Front Door Efforts on the Transformative Edge of Reform

1. **The Family First Prevention Services Act (2018) is a major legislative reform effort that looks to address the front door of the child welfare system by allowing states to submit plans to the federal government to draw down previously restricted Title IV-E funds for prevention services without having to remove the child.** Though the legislation significantly reformed the use of federal child welfare funds, it continues to fall short for many children, youth, and families. The state plans to draw down prevention funds require the services to meet a high evidence-based threshold that restricts some of the most basic yet effective economic and social supports a family needs to remain together. Many of the evidence-based services are not designed to meet the needs of youth and young adults and address the reasons they may be at-risk of coming into foster care. To qualify for these services, the young person must also be deemed a candidate for foster care which is left to the individual states to define and can be restrictive in eligibility for many older youth and their families.

2. **Peer Parent Advocates can assist families in navigating the child welfare system and advocate for the needs of the family.** These programs provide dedicated and supported employment opportunities for parents who have experience with the child welfare system; positions that can further one parent's career while improving access and engagement with services for other families who can see their identities within the provider. State and local jurisdictions have begun to embed these peer parent services in child welfare offices and family courts to help families engage in services and navigate court processes.

Front Door Transformation Efforts

As we imagine a new front door we must push for true transformation of the system and a reorientation to a child and family well-being system. A transformed front door can only happen within a transformed system that operates in a completely different orientation than the current child welfare system. Most of the efforts below have never been attempted or have not been fully implemented by current child welfare systems across the country.

Transformation Efforts Needed for a Front Door to a New System Rooted in Justice

1. **A front door to a new child and family well-being system run by community-based organizations, not government agencies, and designed to keep families intact or supporting youth in their choice to living independently by offering immediate and unrestricted access to:**
 - Universal Basic Income that ensures that families and youth who do not have access to the job market, are unemployed, or pursuing higher education or job training have access to a basic income that allows less than 30% of their income to go to housing costs. This should be coupled with comprehensive employment services to families and youth in entering or reentering the job market and returning to a living wage.
 - Direct Cash Assistance offered short-term in the form of direct cash in the hands of families and youth to help cover basic living expenses and needs on the path to longer-term strategies, such as Universal Basic Income.
2. **Peer Parent Advocates can assist families in navigating the child welfare system and advocate for the needs of the family.** These programs provide dedicated and supported employment opportunities for parents who have experience with the child welfare system; positions that can further one parent's career while improving access and engagement with services for other families who can see their identities within the provider. State and local jurisdictions have begun to embed these peer parent services in child welfare offices and family courts to help families engage in services and navigate court processes.
- Expanded Earned Income Tax Credit that permanently sets the age of eligibility for any youth experiencing homelessness at 18 (including for childless EITC) and increases the annual amount of the credit.
- A dedicated housing voucher program for families and youth who choose independent living, not restricted by eligibility or prioritization requirements but is instead available on-demand for any family or youth in need of a housing unit. The vouchers could be used in the private market and newly developed and rehabbed affordable housing described in the housing pillar.
- Free legal aid and a right to counsel pre-petition and in all court proceedings. All families and youth would be offered free legal assistance to navigate family and youth rights and if the court needed to intervene for matters of safety the family and the youth would each have a right to free counsel.
- State and federally funded supportive services that include access, without any eligibility requirements, to quality:
 - treatment services,
 - mental health services, family counseling and reconciliation services, especially for LGBTQ youth and families,
 - child care,
 - parent supports, and
 - independent living skills
- Services that are provided by parents and youth with experience in the child welfare system (peer-to-peer) and from marginalized communities including Black, Indigenous, Brown, and Queer communities.
- Services that are focused on healing from the trauma caused by the system and by family separation.

2. **Full authority is given to sovereign tribal nations to support tribal families and children,** with no children being removed by any state from tribal communities on or off tribal lands. Tribal nations have access to the same front door services described above with the adequate federal funds to run and support the services through the tribe.



3. **A direct connection to local school systems, rooted in a culture of connecting for assistance and not reporting for investigation unless the immediate safety of the youth is at risk.** School system staff are well trained and equipped to connect youth and their families directly to the front door of the child and family well-being system to ensure quick access to resources. There is a culture shift in the way schools and the front door of the system interact, centered around a partnership with the youth and family to gain access to necessary resources. Schools are also resourced to have in-school behavioral health programs for students and their families that can be easily and directly accessed through their local school.
4. **Mandatory supporting rather than mandatory reporting.** A national cultural shift away from reporting youth and families to the front door of the child welfare system to supporting youth and families in getting to the front door to access the services and supports they need to stay together or find a safe alternative. This cultural shift would empower community members including, schools, friends, family, faith leaders, and business owners, to build a network of support around youth and families as opposed to the adversarial relationship caused by mandatory reporting.

TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION 2:

Abolish the need for foster care, divest from congregate care, and invest in family, kinship, and supported independent living.

Current State of Long-Term Supports for Youth and Young Adults

- The child welfare system has historically had an overdependence on foster care and congregate care settings. This is reinforced by decades of federal funds, Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, restrictions to reimbursing states for foster homes and group homes and underinvestment in prevention funds, and Title IV-B of the Social Security Act. This has led to hundreds of thousands of children and youth languishing in foster care due to the structural racism plaguing the system, resulting in a disproportionate amount of these children being Black, Brown, and Indigenous.
- Efforts to identify families for kinship support and/or social connection are greatly lacking across child welfare systems, particularly for older youth. There are limited and unequal financial and supportive services offered to kin (extended family and friends) who support

children and youth who cannot live with their biological parents. Kinship supports vary across states and counties and often offer smaller financial payments than those made to foster homes and do not include access to other public benefits and supportive services.

- Screening protocols rooted in racist policies often led to many Black, Brown, and Indigenous kin being rejected as a placement option or from receiving assistance from the system. Many family members feel unsupported and even criminalized within the system leading to lower kinship engagement and a lack of family and social connection for many older youth in the system.
- Group care is especially harmful to young people in foster care. Many states continue to have an overreliance on congregate care or group homes for older youth, even though many youth in these placements do not have special treatment needs that warrant such placements. Group care placements leave youth without access to the social and emotional support of a family, they are punitive and deny youth of developmentally appropriate experiences and relationship building with their peers, and they often lead to youth running from the system and increased rates of homelessness.
- The lack of safe options for young people and the lack of agency in being able to make choices about the types of placements they receive from the current child welfare system leads to some young people running away for their own safety and well-being, greatly increasing their risk of homelessness and exploitation.

End State of Long-Term Supports Rooted in Justice:

Children and youth who cannot safely remain with their birth parents are thriving with kinship or chosen families or living independently with supports outlined in Action 3.

The Path to our End State of Long-Term Support Rooted in Justice:

Long-Term Supports Reform Efforts

In an attempt to reduce foster care and congregate care placements, the child welfare system has attempted several reform efforts that increase support to kin (family and friends) and restrict the use of congregate care placements. These reform efforts have helped to reduce placement in more

restrictive settings but still offer unequal and inadequate assistance to kinship homes and a lack of options for youth to live independently with support.

Example of Long-Term Support Reforms

1. **Guardian Assistance Program (GAP)** was authorized in the 2008 Fostering Connections and Increasing Adoptions Act, and allows for financial payments to kinship placements, specifically relatives who are caring for children. Although this opened access to financial assistance for relative caregivers, the process to become eligible has many bureaucratic barriers, including criminal background check requirements and home assessments that disproportionately and negatively affect marginalized community members from becoming approved. This often leaves older youth, particularly Black, Indigenous, and Brown youth, without access to financially supported kinship homes.
2. **The Family First Prevention Services Act (2018) is a major legislative reform effort that looked to address congregate care by restricting reimbursements for congregate care and group homes and requiring states to use more specialized foster care options.** Though the legislation significantly restricts congregate care and group homes, it does so without investing in kinship supports and independent housing options for older youth in the system, leaving many states with a lack of placement options for youth as they move out of group homes and back into the community. This has the risk of leading to more criminalization of youth in the community and greater dependency on the youth homelessness system for housing. The law also allows for exceptions to using federal funds for group care that may disproportionately affect older teens, particularly teens of color, for example, states can use federal dollars for group care if the youth/child is at risk of trafficking. These exemptions may lead to some states disproportionately using group home care for youth of color.

Long-Term Support Efforts on the Transformative Edge of Reform

States and counties have also attempted to imagine a new way of offering out-of-home care for children and youth by pushing beyond the current regulatory and funding barriers that plague the system. These efforts have brought the system to the edge of transformation but have not been implemented to scale or in a way that has transformed the system.

Examples of Long-Term Support Efforts on the Transformative Edge of Reform

1. **Title IV-E Child Welfare Demonstrations projects** ran from 1994-2006 and 2011-2019 and allowed states to submit waivers to the federal government to allow for more flexible use of Title IV-E of the Social Security Act (the largest federal pot of money for child welfare services). Under the waiver program, states were able to test prevention efforts that included subsidizing kinship care, providing specialized treatment services, and using funding flexibly to offer more robust services that met the needs of children, youth, and families. These waivers gave states flexibility to test new ways to address the needs of families and focus on keeping families intact. It led to the creation and passage of the Families First legislation, though this legislation has proven to be more reformist in nature as outlined in the reform section.
2. **Direct financial assistance and/or rental subsidy and optional supportive services to youth's kinship networks** to offer permanent housing options. Several communities are implementing this strategy through the homeless response system, outside of the child welfare system, through the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) and others with the assistance of Point Source Youth.

Long-Term Support Transformative Efforts

As we imagine a new set of long-term supports we must push for true transformation of the system and a reorientation to a child and family well-being system. A transformed set of long-term supports can only happen within a transformed system that operates in a completely different orientation than the current child welfare system. Most of the efforts below have never been attempted or have not been fully implemented by the current child welfare systems across the country.

Transformative Efforts Needed for Long-Term Supports Rooted in Justice:

1. **Federally funded kinship support to any relative (including chosen family) that is providing a home**

to a child or youth in the child and family well-being system that offers the following:

- Adequate financial payments without restrictions or eligibility requirements beyond those central to the safety of a child or youth; this would include no longer disqualifying kinship providers for criminal histories that are not a direct and imminent safety risk to a young person, immigration status, living situation, or any other factor that does not pose a direct and imminent risk to child safety.
- Comprehensive economic supports to the youth and family that include those described in the front door section (universal basic income, housing, and supportive services).
- Access to support workers, case managers, and practitioners with lived experience in the child welfare system and representative of Black, Indigenous, Brown, and LGBTQ communities.
- Access to free legal aid and the right to counsel for the kinship provider and youth in any court hearings.
- Access to universal health care for the entire family.

2. **Laws that allow for youth under the age of 18 to live independently in housing of their choice, laws that support chosen families to host youth in rental units and owned homes, and the legal support to access their rights.** Law changes and legal support include pathways to emancipation, the right to consent to housing and services, the right to rent in the private and public housing market, and the right to legally add youth to a household while protecting tenant and homeownership rights.
3. **Youth and young adult choice in placement and services.** Youth and young adults have equitable decision-making authority in the type of placement (kinship or supported independent living), the persons they are placed with, and the case management plans and services they engage with through the system.
4. **A fully supported independent living option** with access to all of the supports and services outlined in Transformative Action 3

TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION 3:

Invest in the economic resources and supportive services youth and their families need to successfully support transitions to adulthood.

Current State of Supports for Youth Exiting the Child Welfare System

- The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, offers dedicated resources to older youth in the child welfare system and those who have transitioned out of the system. These resources include life skills supports, education and employment vouchers, housing supports, and other supportive services but have been underfunded for decades. This has left states and counties with limited funds to address the education, employment, housing, and well-being needs of older youth involved in the child welfare system and who have aged out of the system.
- Older youth in the system have some of the highest rates of multiple foster home placements, continually upending their education and sense of belonging. There is still an over-dependence on group homes and congregate care as described in Action 2. And there is often a lack of ability to move older youth to permanent homes with family, with too few resources focused on locating and supporting families for older youth.
- Young people who experience the current child welfare system in any way, foster care, guardianship, kinship care, or adoptions have a greater risk of experiencing homelessness. However, many transition services are only offered to youth who were in foster care, leaving many young people who experienced the system without support through early adulthood.
- Housing, education, and employment supports are limited and vary from state to state. While housing voucher and higher education support programs have assisted youth in some states, there are still far too few of the resources to meet the need and far too many eligibility requirements to remain on the assistance.

End State of Youth Supports Rooted in Justice:

Any youth who has been served by the child welfare system is entitled to affordable and safe housing, basic income and employment services, free education, quality health care, and social and family connections through the age of 30.

The Path to our End State of Transition Supports Rooted in Justice:

Transition Supports Reform Efforts

In an attempt to support older youth in the child welfare system and those transitioning out, the child welfare system has attempted several reform efforts that offer economic and social support. These reform efforts have helped to offer housing, education, and employment support but are drastically underfunded, often give youth little to no agency, and continue to fail in meeting the needs of the majority of youth.

Examples of Transition Support Reforms

1. **Federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 - Extended Foster Care:** This federal legislation allows for states to extend foster care for youth still in care until the age of 21 if the youth meets one of the 5 requirements [education (high school or postsecondary), employment, program to address barriers, or disability]. The extended foster care allows youth to continue to be supported with foster care payments which can go to support room and board, to a home, or directly to the youth, depending on the implementing agency. This program has led to further stability and education and employment opportunities for some youth who have experienced the foster care system but, depending on the state, may still have high barriers to retaining eligibility. Other youth reject this support due to the connection to an agency that caused trauma for them. The extension of foster care is also an option left to the state, so not all states give access to the extension or may drastically limit access.
2. **The John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee program)** offers dedicated resources to older youth in the child welfare system and those who have transitioned out of the system. These resources include life skills supports, education and employment vouchers, housing supports, and other supportive services. The Family First legislation allowed states to extend the age limit on the independent living programs from 21 to 23, although not all states have implemented this extension, and the education and training voucher from 23 to 26. The program continues to be underfunded and the resources vary greatly across the country with many jurisdictions still using the money for poorly administered life skills classes and high barrier transitional living programs that have not shown successful outcomes.



3. **Family Unification Program (FUP)** offers a dedicated but limited set of housing choice vouchers (federal subsidy) for youth and young adults with a child welfare history. There are still far too few vouchers available to meet the need, they lack access to supportive services funding stream, and are limited to those youth who have been in out-of-home (foster care/group home) placements at the age of 16 or older.

Transition Support Efforts on the Transformative Edge of Reform

There have been limited attempts by the child welfare system to push supports for older youth to the transformative edge. These efforts often come from supporting systems such as the education and housing system, as a way to offer the support needed for transitioning out of care.

Examples of Transition Support Efforts on the Transformative Edge of Reform

1. **The John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee program) (COVID Flexibility)** - During the global pandemic, Congress made a much needed new investment in Chafee and allowed temporary flexibilities that should allow more youth to gain critical access, including increasing the age of eligibility through a young person's 26th year and removing the 30% cap on states' use of Chafee funds for room and board. States can use these funds to provide direct financial assistance and meet other immediate needs.
2. **Foster Youth to Independence (FYI)** offers a dedicated but limited set of housing choice vouchers (federal subsidy) for youth and young adults with a child welfare history. In the last two budget cycles, there was an investment of \$40M in new funding into the program. This new investment allows for on-demand vouchers (capped at 25 per year per public housing authority, with the ability to request up to 25 additional) and a competitive pot of vouchers for local jurisdictions that need more than 25 per year. This new investment will allow for greater access but there is still a lack of access to a dedicated supportive services funding stream, and are limited to those youth who have been in out-of-home (foster care/group home) placements at the age of 16 or older.
3. **Free year-round housing on campus and tuition for youth who have left the foster care system.** Several university systems around the country have created supported programs for tuition, education supports, and housing for youth who have experienced the child welfare system.

Transition Supports Transformative Efforts

As we imagine a new set of transition supports we must push for true transformation of the system and a re-orientation to a child and family well-being system. A transformed set of transition supports can only happen within a transformed system that operates in a completely different orientation than the current child welfare system. Most of the efforts below have never been attempted or have not been fully implemented by the current child welfare systems across the country.

Transformative Efforts Needed for Transition Supports Rooted in Justice:

1. **Provide extended Foster Care for any young person who has had contact with the child welfare system.** The support offered in the extended foster care system should be open to all youth, in every state and U.S. territory, who have had any experience with the child welfare system (in-home services, kinship care, foster care, guardianship, or adoption). Eligibility should not be tied to education, employment, programs that reduce barriers to employment, or disability; and all requirements related to immigration and citizenship status should be removed to be eligible for federal IV-E funding. The program should also offer the foster care maintenance payment directly to youth in the form of cash assistance and should be designed in partnership with young people to ensure it is offered in a way that meets the needs of young people of various ages and needs.
2. **Fully fund the Chafee program with the permanent flexibilities offered during COVID-19.** This should include an increased federal investment that allows for all young people who have had contact with the child welfare system (in-home services, kinship care, foster care, guardianship, or adoption) to access the full benefits of the program, including, but not limited to, financial assistance and housing support. The program should permanently include many of the flexibilities provided during the pandemic, such as increasing the age of eligibility through a young person's 26th year. In addition, the program should be improved to ensure that effective practices, such as providing direct financial assistance, are core elements of the program.
3. **Make federal, state, local, and private investments in neighborhood and community-based organizations led by Black, Brown, Indigenous, and LGBTQ folks.** These investments must include support to the organizations to accept and operate the funding streams and give the organizations the flexibility to design and implement supports at the levels, lengths of times, and amount of times that can support youth in making safe mistakes while retaining their housing.
4. **Support for Black, Brown, Indigenous, and LGBTQ communities to govern the systems that operate the supports.** This must include representation on boards and in leadership positions, and it must include a new way of governing the systems that defuse the decision-making power across a broader range of community stakeholders to ensure that no one set of leaders holds the power within these systems.
5. **Federally funded universal health care benefits** that allow for all youth and young adults access to comprehensive coverage to physical, mental health, and substance use service providers and financially incentives providers to offer services within marginalized communities by practitioners from marginalized communities. Services should also work to shift the culture and normalize access and utilization of mental health services and self-care.
6. **A federal living wage that is adjusted according to the cost of living within an area,** ensuring that youth and young adults entering the job market for the first time can earn enough to allow for less than 30% of their income to go to housing costs.
7. **Universal basic income** that ensures that families and youth who do not have access to the job market, are unemployed, or pursuing higher education or job training have access to a basic income that allows less than 30% of their income to go to housing costs. This should be coupled with comprehensive employment services to families and youth in entering or reentering the job market and returning to a living wage.
8. **Federal savings program connected to housing** that assists youth, who choose to participate, in saving a portion of their rental income and/or mortgage payment into a federally backed savings and match program until the age of 30.



9. Fully supported education and career pathways connected to housing, food, and other basic human needs for all youth and young adults that includes: national free college tuition and student loan debt forgiveness; free tuition to complete trade schooling and job training programs; and robust, fully funded, pathways to high school graduation that include adult learning strategies for older youth. And financial support to pursue entrepreneurship ideas and careers of a young person's choice.

10. Investments that support digital equity. This includes access to free broadband and digital devices that enable young people to participate in the economy and pursue educational activities.

11. Support young people in building social capital, including investing in programs and strategies that engage and support a young person's community. These include family, social, cultural, and faith connections, in order to build social connections that can assist with employment opportunities, social-emotional well-being, and access to financial support.

For more information:

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