



July 22, 2022

New York Delegation Members
in the U.S. House of Representatives
in the U.S. Senate

Re: Children's Defense Fund-NY Youth Led Briefing on Transition Age Youth in Foster Care

Dear Delegation Members:

We want to thank so many of you for joining our online Briefing last week about Transition Age Youth (TAY) in foster care in New York. For those of you who could not be there, the webinar was recorded and is available here:

<https://www.journeytosuccess.org/resources/ny-delegation-debrief-video-directory>.

We will be following up with our Journey to Success campaign partners and colleagues in the Federal Transition Age Youth Coalition to schedule time with you this summer and fall.

As our colleague **Chidera Sibedu, Youth Action Organizer** shared, "we are interested in engaging in a conversation regarding what we conclude would ensure positive change for Transition Aged Youth, who are dealing with issues they are not prepared for such as racial injustice, food insecurity, housing issues, and emotional stress. This is where advancing our specific agenda can help."

The transition to adulthood is a pivotal time for all young people. The investments that you make during this time can have an extraordinary impact on the futures of young people with experience in foster care. Our team, which includes people with lived expertise in the system and those living in communities with disproportionate contact with child welfare, wanted to uplift some of the topics we covered at the Briefing:

Priority #1: Nothing About us Without Us

Christine Joseph, Youth Action Organizer helped us to frame this issue in the webinar this way: "Young people who age-out of foster care are more likely than their peers to face homelessness, struggle to find work, and are less likely to finish high school or college. As someone who never really had a voice while I was in the system, I want to focus on how important it is that our laws change to make sure that we have ways to ensure that young people's voices are heard. Mental health was a critical part of my journey through the system, and an area where I wish I had been given the opportunity to provide guidance and advice to the child welfare system so that it could improve. I struggled because services that were designed to help me were disrupted – they stopped at times when I needed them most. I know that I'm not the only one that this

happens to in the system.”

Background:

- There are over 4,500 youth aged 14 and older in foster care in New York State. Over 1,700 are aged 18 and over.
- More than 20,000 young adults aged-out of foster care in the U.S. in 2020. Here in New York State, more than 1000 youth “age-out” of foster care each year.

Congress should require that each State Child Welfare System . . .

- Collect feedback from TAY as least annually as part of data collection and quality assurance systems connected with Title IV-E and IV-B and make that information public.
- Collaborate with TAY to develop goals and outcomes for services and programs in their communities, including Chafee funded services and services provided in extended foster care. Where resources and supports fail to meet the goals and outcome created with TAY, there should be consequences so that systems are effectively serving young people.
- Collaborate with TAY to review all existing policies around TAY and create new policies through compensated advisory boards or similar structures staffed with TAY.

Priority # 2: Prioritize Health & Healing for Transition Age Youth

Jose Perez, our Transition Age Youth Project Manager explained why we are so focused on health and healing: “The mental health crisis we are seeing in the U.S. today among children and adolescents is really the same as what many young people in foster care have faced for a long time. The trauma I endured in the foster care system caused me to see myself as someone unworthy of anything. I was hopeless that things would get better. This is a critical moment for us to be focusing on health and wellbeing – the stakes are high.”

Background:

- In NYC, a 2022 survey of youth in care aged 13 and older showed that: 30% of boys and 40% of girls reported “feeling down, depressed, or hopeless” within the last 2 weeks.
- National data shows that TAY have much higher rates of health problems than non-foster care youth, including hospitalization due to illness or emotional health needs.

Congress should require that each State Child Welfare System . . .

- Build a continuum of support and developmentally appropriate supports from wellness and well-being, mentoring, community support all the way through crisis mental health services that are culturally responsive and flexible – not cookie-cutter for all TAY.
- Strengthen the planning and coordination among child welfare, health, and mental health agencies and child welfare and Medicaid funding streams to improve the availability of, quality of, and access to, services for TAY.
- Address the overuse of psychotropic medications among TAY. Build in policies that

interrupt the knee-jerk reaction to medicate behavior.

Priority #3: Connecting to Community Supports

As **Denice Ocana, Youth Action Organizer** explains, “for transition-age youth, being connected to community resources would be of great benefit. Please think back to this phase in your life and think of the support systems you may have had. Not having support or connections to those with knowledge in these aspects of life tends to place an extra burden on any individual.”

Background:

- In New York State, only one-third of young people who age out of foster care were enrolled in school at age 21.
- Only half of TAY had completed high school or their GED by the time they turned 19.
- One in five youth aging out of foster care in New York has experienced homelessness within the last 2 years.

Congress should . . .

- Increase the amount of money provided to States (the Chafee allocation) to provide an array of supports and programs to TAY through age 25.
- Require States to work with TAY to develop core resources and effective support, like peer mentoring/navigators.
- Require States to include direct financial (cash) assistance to TAY as part of their transition and support through age 25 so that they are able to meet their basic needs, develop financial capability and build assets.
- Require States to use trusted, community-based organizations with strong ties to TAY to provide resources instead of only governmental child welfare agencies.
- Recognize young adult’s autonomy, self-determination and need for flexible resources and supports – not just services and programs.

We are excited about being part of a national movement for Transition Age Youth in child welfare, and we need you – our elected representatives – to make our community a priority. We want to partner with you in this critical moment for young people.

In solidarity for the young people of New York State,

Chidera Sibeudu, Youth Action Organizer, Children’s Defense Fund-NY

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Susan Notkin, Executive Vice President, the Center for the Study of Social Policy