



# **Written Testimony Submitted to the New York Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Public Forum on Racial Disparities in the New York Child Welfare System**

August 18, 2023

## **Background**

YouthNPower: Transforming Care is an intergenerational collective that includes young people who are aged 18 through 26 with lived expertise in the child welfare system and those who are from over-surveilled communities. Working with researchers, policy advocates and organizers, we are exploring, documenting and expressing the power, needs, and desires of young people transitioning out of foster care as young adults in New York City. YouthNPower is a collaboration of the Children’s Defense Fund-New York, the Public Science Project at the CUNY Graduate Center, the Center for the Study of Social Policy, and New Yorkers For Children.

We appreciate this opportunity to supplement the oral testimony provided by our collective members Mya Martinez, Christine Joseph, and Grace Tatom at the April 19, 2023 hearing for people directly impacted by the system in New York. This written testimony includes contributions from Mya Martinez, Christine Joseph, Amal Kharoufi, Denice Ocana, Susan Notkin and Julia Davis. We have included new data and analysis from a survey conducted of 100 youth aged 18-22 who have aged-out of foster care in New York City. This representative sample of young adults were selected to participate in the YouthNPower direct cash transfer (DCT) pilot in June 2023. The preliminary analysis included as a part of this testimony provides valuable insights on the experiences of youth who age-out in New York City and who have been directly impacted by the foster care and child welfare systems.

More information about the YouthNPower: Transforming Care collective is available at our project website: [www.YouthNPower.org](http://www.YouthNPower.org).

## The Effect of the System’s Racism on Our Lives and Communities

Our Black and Brown communities have had to fend for ourselves for too long – finding ways to get what we need to survive. The child welfare system claims to help us and to see that our families receive what we need to be safe and whole, but the reality is that our struggle is usually made harder—not easier—through contact with child welfare. This is not happening to all young people, but to young Black and Brown people in our communities. We urge you to adopt a framing in your recommendations that does not seek to “equalize” contacts between the child welfare system and all communities to address “disparities.”<sup>1</sup> Equity in this sense is not the goal. We want to see this system shrink and to replace it with other investments in the things communities need to thrive.

### *The System’s Front Door – Investigations*

**Our families are investigated.** Almost 45% of Black and Latinx children in New York City will experience a child protection investigation by age 18.<sup>2</sup> Among White children, this rate is only 19%.<sup>3</sup> While Black and Latinx children represent only 60% of the New York City population, they make up 90% of the children in foster care.<sup>4</sup> Their families are also less likely to be supported with services to help them care for their children and more likely to have them removed and placed into foster care.<sup>5</sup>

It should be shocking to this Commission that 1 out of every 15 Black children and 1 out of every 18 Latinx children in New York City experienced a Child Protective Services (CPS) investigation in 2019.<sup>6</sup> Is this about safety when as few as a third of investigations result in a finding of abuse or neglect?<sup>7</sup>

We believe that the resources spent on investigation and surveillance could have been better spent on aiding families. In the most current report from New York City’s child

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<sup>1</sup> For more discussion of the need to move discourse beyond “disparities” to confront structural racism and discrimination in the U.S. Child Welfare system, see *Racial Discrimination in Child Welfare Is a Human Rights Violation—Let’s Talk About It That Way. Public acknowledgement of the discriminatory harms perpetrated by the child welfare system is long overdue.* By Shereen A. White and Stephanie Persson. American Bar Association (2022), available at: <https://www.americanbar.org/groups/litigation/committees/childrens-rights/articles/2022/fall2022-racial-discrimination-in-child-welfare-is-a-human-rights-violation/>.

<sup>2</sup> NYC Family Policy Project, Racial Disparities (data from 2019), available at: <https://familypolicynyc.org/data-brief/racial-disparities/>.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> NYC Family Policy Project, Hotline Calls (2019), available at: <https://familypolicynyc.org/data-brief/hotline-calls/>.

<sup>7</sup> *New York City Administration for Children’s Services, Flash Report (June 2023)*, slide 8, available at: <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/flashReports/2023/06.pdf>.

welfare system, over two-thirds of CPS investigations involved neglect allegations,<sup>8</sup> which is closely associated with poverty. This is well-known among child welfare system administrators. In a recent national survey, approximately 75% of child welfare leaders believe that the inability to meet basic needs is frequently a *primary reason* for child maltreatment reports and 100% identify it as a *contributing reason*.<sup>9</sup>

We need to stop thinking that a CPS investigation links families with resources. As an example, a new report from the New York City Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence speaks to the extreme vulnerability that families experience even *after* they encounter CPS. The study includes findings that show families who received child welfare prevention services were twice as likely to enter the homeless shelter system than those who had not received services.<sup>10</sup> Child welfare services, which are not designed to address housing instability, often fail to meet the basic needs of families to remain safe in communities.

### *The System's Last Door – Aging Out*

**We age-out.** The deeper we go into the system, the more we see the impact on Black and Brown children and youth. In New York City where YouthNPower is based, 97% of youth who aged-out of foster care in 2022 were people of color.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, New York City reports that more than 1 in 4 people who identify as female who aged-out in 2022 were parenting at the time they left foster care.<sup>12</sup> Among a representative group of youth who have aged-out of foster care in New York City participating in our Direct Cash Transfer pilot aged 18 through 22, we found that:

- 42 out of 100 are parenting
- 6 out of 100 were pregnant at the time of their application

Often, leaving foster care is not the end of contact with the system. The threat of intergenerational involvement with CPS is a very real likelihood. While NYC does not

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<sup>8</sup> NYC Administration for Children's Services, Flash Report, Monthly Indicators (from March 23rd- May 23rd, 2023) Jun 2023, slide 31, available at: <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/flashReports/2023/06.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Heaton, L., Cepuran, C., Grewal-Kök, Y., and Anderson, C. (Report forthcoming). *The role of concrete and economic in prevention of maltreatment: Findings from a national study of child welfare leaders*. Chapin Hall and American Public Human Services Association. Chicago, IL, and Washington, DC.

<sup>10</sup> NYC CIDI, *Homeless Prevention: At-Risk Students in New York City Schools*, July 2023 at 17, available at: <https://www.nyc.gov/site/cidi/projects/homeless-prevention-at-risk-students-in-NYC-schools.page>.

<sup>11</sup> NYC Administration for Children's Services, Youth in Foster Care 2022 Report. (The 500 youth between ages 18-20 who were discharged without permanency or who reached the age of 21 while in foster care were 58% Black, 33% Latinx, 2% Asian and 4% "Other/Unknown.") Available at: <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/2022/ReportOnYouthInFC2022.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

collect data about the number of youth who age-out and face CPS investigation as parents, our collective experience reveals the risk is high.

The data paint a dire picture of what is happening to Black and Brown families and young adults in New York City, yet they tell only part of the story. To “fix” this system we need to step back and listen to the young people who have experienced foster care and examine the negative impact of system “intervention” on them, especially on those who have aged-out or have had past contact with the system and are now young adults. What’s needed is an understanding of our reality—how we are experiencing this in our bodies, our relationships, our families, and our communities.

As we have set forth in this testimony, these harms are not distributed equally across our communities. Black and Brown youth are the ones who struggle to find and connect with family, to know our full identity and origins. We also struggle with our mental health, caring for our own children, finding safe housing, and securing what we need to thrive. We do the hard work of rebuilding ourselves after the harms experienced in foster care, only to move to marginalized communities with other hard-pressed Black and Brown people who are struggling to survive. Our communities have never had real economic investment, have outsized police presence, and are places where it is hard for us to get our needs met. We are left to navigate public housing and benefits systems, work, and school for ourselves and our children with little support.

### **Contact with the Child Welfare System is Often About Where You Live**

Where you live and the surrounding level of surveillance determines whether you are likely to come to the attention of the child welfare system. Factors like the state of housing, whether you have heat, the kinds of police presence in your neighborhood, and what and whether concrete and social supports exist, contribute to whether your family will be the subject of an investigation, or whether you will enter foster care. What is happening to our communities now is wrong.

For example, in Brownsville Brooklyn, which has seen generations of economic divestment, 1 out of every 5 families faced the threat of a CPS investigation through a hotline call in 2019.<sup>13</sup> In the Bronx community of Hunts Point it was 1 in 7.<sup>14</sup> Hotline calls and CPS investigations—which rarely provide families with the help they need—leave

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<sup>13</sup> NYC Family Policy Project, Hotline Calls (2019), available at: <https://familypolicynyc.org/data-brief/hotline-calls/> (“Hotline calls are highly concentrated in just a few neighborhoods where hotline call rates are double or even triple the citywide average, such as in Brownsville, where the hotline call rate was 188 calls per 1,000 families in 2019 or in Hunts Point, where it was 141 calls per 1,000 families.”).

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*

families and youth feeling confused, isolated, ashamed, and traumatized. Again, these are Black and Brown families and communities.

## **Young People Need Support, Protection, and Healing**

### *Healing our Mental Health*

Another pressing concern is the availability of services for young people with lived experience when they move beyond the child welfare system. Nationally, 80% of young people in foster care confront significant mental health needs. This is in comparison to only 18 to 22% of the general population.<sup>15</sup> When we consider the fact that most young people in the child welfare system in New York are Black and Brown, we see the mental health crisis is deeply rooted in the same oppressive systems and conditions that we have described in this testimony.

The trauma of living in places that feel unsafe, exacerbated by being separated from families and forced into unknown environments by those getting paid to care for you, only worsens the mental health struggles facing many young people. In our own survey of a representative group of young adults aged 18-22 who had aged-out of foster care in New York City,<sup>16</sup> we found:

- Nearly 30% (28 out of 96) scored a 13 or greater on the Kessler 6 Psychological Distress Scale, which has been found to indicate a clinically significant degree of emotional distress.
- Only 18% (17 out of 96) reported that they currently see a therapist.
- Of the 79 people who do not currently see a therapist, nearly half (47%) were interested in seeing one but felt unable due to barriers such as cost (20%), difficulty finding a therapist they liked (62%), and/or difficulty finding a therapist that accepted their insurance (32%).
- Nearly 25% (22 out of 96) reported that they felt nervous and stressed nearly *every day* in the last 30 days.

While mental health is important for everyone, mental stability and wellness in adolescent years is critical to our development and ability to navigate the adult world. In New York, one of the biggest challenges is having enough high-quality, and culturally

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<sup>15</sup> Child Welfare Gateway, National Foster Care Month (2023), available at: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/fostercaremonth/awareness/facts/>.

<sup>16</sup> Preliminary analysis of YouthNPower survey of 100 youth aged 18-22 who had aged-out of foster care in New York City. Survey respondents reflect a representative sample of youth who have aged-out of foster care in New York City, based on age, race ethnicity, gender and LGBTQIA identity. The survey was conducted in June 2023 among direct cash transfer pilot participants prior to receiving cash payments.

responsive, community-based mental health services rather than resorting to institutional settings like hospitals.<sup>17</sup> If we want to meaningfully address the youth mental health crisis, we must confront the nexus with child welfare. And as members of our Collective have already expressed that we need young people to shape that care in our communities.<sup>18</sup>

As the New York Advisory Committee makes findings and considers recommendations, we urge you to center the mental health needs of young adults in your thinking. This is necessary from both a reparative perspective – *what young people who have survived foster care deserve* – and from the perspective of how to move forward – *what makes communities stronger*.

### *Living in Safe and Stable Housing*

Children who are separated from their families of origin and placed in foster care are much more likely to experience homelessness when compared to those who have never been removed from their homes.<sup>19</sup> In addition to this risk of family homelessness as a child, those who age-out of foster care as young adults are also vulnerable.

Our own research from YouthNPower shows that young people who have left foster care as adults struggle with finding and keeping safe housing:<sup>20</sup>

- Only 50% of respondents (48 out of 96) agreed that their current housing situation was “stable.”
- 75% of respondents (72 out of 96) expressed that they wished they could live somewhere else but cannot afford it.
- One-third of respondents (32 out of 96) expressed that it is stressful finding a place to sleep.
- 36% (35 out of 96) have felt stuck in a bad or dangerous housing situation.
- 18% (17 out of 96) have had to stay with an abusive family member or partner because they had nowhere else to go.
- 17% (16 out of 96) have slept outside, in public transportation, or in a vehicle.

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<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Youth Mental Health Listening Tour Report (2023) from the New York State Office of Mental Health and Office of Children and Family Services, available at: <https://omh.ny.gov/omhweb/statistics/youth-mh-listening-tour-report.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Amal Kharoufi, [It is Time to Prioritize Young People’s Mental Health](#), *The Imprint*, Feb. 13, 2023.

<sup>19</sup> NYC CIDI, *Homeless Prevention: At-Risk Students in New York City Schools*, July 2023, available at: <https://www.nyc.gov/site/cidi/projects/homeless-prevention-at-risk-students-in-NYC-schools.page>.

<sup>20</sup> Preliminary analysis of YouthNPower survey of 100 youth aged 18-22 who had aged-out of foster care in New York City. Survey respondents reflect a representative sample of youth who have aged-out of foster care in New York City, based on age, race ethnicity, gender and LGBTQIA identity. The survey was conducted in June 2023 among direct cash transfer pilot participants prior to receiving cash payments.

- 11% (11 out of 96) have done something they did not want to do or traded sex in exchange for a place to sleep.

The New York Advisory Committee should examine some of the recommendations developed by UNITE, a partnership of YouthNPower: Transforming Care and the Youth Advisory Board of the Coalition for Homeless Youth in New York City.<sup>21</sup> The Advisory Committee should address the ways that foster care leads to youth homelessness and housing instability among all Black and Brown youth and endorse bold investments in new housing for young adults with system experience (one of the core UNITE demands).<sup>22</sup>

### *Disrupting the Foster Care to Prison Pipeline*

Finally, we need to think about how exposure to foster care puts young people at greater risk of involvement in the criminal legal system, and how foster care acts as a prison pipeline. New research from YouthNPower shows that among young adults 18-22 who have aged-out of foster care in New York City:<sup>23</sup>

- Half (48 out of 96 respondents) had at least one kind of negative interaction<sup>24</sup> with the New York City Police Department (NYPD) in the last year.
- 14 of the 48 (29%) had 5 or more negative interactions with the NYPD in the last year.
- 18 out of 96 (19%) were held in an adult jail or prison, or a juvenile detention or placement facility in the past year.

Survey respondents shared their own reflections on the role of the police in their lives as they exit the foster care systems and the enduring intersections between the child welfare and criminal legal systems. One young person shared:

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<sup>21</sup> *Recommendations of Project UNITE* (May 2023), addressing specific policy and budget recommendations to address the intersection of child welfare and youth homelessness in New York City. Available here: <https://www.cdfny.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2023/06/UNITE-Recommendations-5.26.23.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> *Id.*

<sup>23</sup> Preliminary analysis of YouthNPower survey of 100 youth aged 18-22 who had aged-out of foster care in New York City. Survey respondents reflect a representative sample of youth who have aged-out of foster care in New York City, based on age, race ethnicity, gender and LGBTQIA identity. The survey was conducted in June 2023 among direct cash transfer pilot participants prior to receiving cash payments.

<sup>24</sup> In the YouthNPower survey, “negative interactions” included: being stopped and questioned, being arrested, being spoken to disrespectfully/harassed, being held in jail, prison or detention, being stopped and patted down/searched, being threatened with violence/force by police, being the subject of police making a racial or ethnic slur, being physically hurt or injured by police, or reporting that police broke, took or damaged property. The data reflect respondents who had one or more of these experiences.

*“It's terrible. It's never going to make headlines. But it's exhausting and stressful, and if you don't have the knowledge like me or the advocacy skills - you're left to struggle silently.”*

We urge the Advisory Committee to confront how contact with the child welfare system is linked to contact with other punitive systems. Confining the inquiry to “disproportionate” or “disparate” impact *within child welfare* (typically seen through rates of investigations, family separation, foster care, institutionalization and aging-out) misses the point. What our collective experience at YouthNPower shows is that we need to be thinking about the harms – and the future – in much bigger ways that address how child welfare funnels young people into *other failing systems*: criminal legal, mental health, as well as public housing and shelters. Once we widen our lens, we have room for our collective vision and recommendations.

## **Our Vision for the Future and Recommendations**

### *Nothing About Us Without Us*

At YouthNPower, we insist that there be “Nothing About Us Without Us.” We are here to work with our community to reimagine support and demand effective policies for youth and families in crisis. We are committed to boldly transforming our systems to be caring and just.

Young people who have experienced child welfare need to be at the table with Advisory Committee members interpreting the information you collected in public hearings and written testimony and shaping the call to action. Our voices, experiences, and recommendations will help ensure that the Advisory Committee’s findings are what families and young people need and want. The future of the child welfare system should be designed with the expertise of young people.

We envision young people safe and supported in their families of origin or families of choice.

Until that vision can be realized, young people aging-out of foster care need to know their rights and entitlements, and have room to make their own choices about their transition to independence. As young people move from adolescence to young adulthood out of foster care, they need support for what they actually want and need – not what is easiest, fastest, most expedient, and what system administrators choose for them.



## *Moving Outside of Crisis and Transforming Care Within Communities*

We further urge the Advisory Committee to endorse deep investments in community-based and culturally responsive resources dedicated to economic mobility, entrepreneurship and pathways to careers with potential for intergenerational wealth. The Advisory Committee should reframe “child welfare” from a system of intervention to government-sponsored and organized investments in community well-being in the very neighborhoods that have the highest rates of CPS investigations and foster care removals. That means calling for significant investment in permanent affordable housing, culturally responsive mental health and wellness, substance abuse and healing-centered supports, and pathways to economic freedom. Families should not have to reach the point of crisis to receive help.

As many of our Collective members testified during the April 2023 hearing, we need to examine the history of divestment and economic oppression, address poverty and build resources that will lift youth up without punitive or controlling policies. These resources should not increase surveillance or control of young adults or families but should offer support and encouragement.

As an example of this kind of approach, members of YouthNPower: Transforming Care spoke at the State Capitol in Albany in support of new legislation to create a state-wide ***Child and Family Wellbeing Fund***. Collective member, Embraia Fraizer, was quoted in *The Imprint* about community power and the Fund’s importance to so many impacted young people and their families: “I am here supporting the Child Wellbeing Fund because who can know the needs of our communities better than the ones who live and serve there daily?”<sup>25</sup> The Fund, which is currently the focus of state-wide organizing, would support children, youth and families by investing resources in communities that have been historically disenfranchised and targeted for government intervention through the CPS and child welfare system.

The Fund’s structure is grounded in the principles described above: “nothing about us without us,” investments in community assets instead of interventions to respond to crisis, and self-determination and choice:

- **Community-driven Investment:** The new Child and Family Wellbeing Fund would direct state dollars to groups that are deeply embedded in communities and responsive to community needs. Grantees would be determined by a local

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<sup>25</sup> *The Imprint, Upstream City: To Change Conditions for Families, Shift Power Out of Systems* Feb. 15, 2023, By Nora McCarthy, available at: <https://imprintnews.org/opinion/upstream-city-shift-power-systems-communities/238516>.

advisory committee who have been identified by the community, composed of individuals with lived experience and individuals with professional experience in relevant public system policy and community engagement.

- **Operational Accountability:** Since the vision is to prioritize small, local groups and organizations that may not have capacity to seek out and apply for state grants, the Fund will operate through a “backbone” intermediary organization, which will provide technical assistance and support for communities to determine which kinds of community investments they want, support local advisory committees in soliciting and evaluating grant proposals, and distributing funding according to local advisory committee decisions.
- **Reporting and Evaluation:** The backbone organization would be responsible for documenting the grants, collecting information for evaluation and producing public reports to the legislature and the public that demonstrate the process, impact, and effects of the Fund’s community-led grant-making process and state-funded investments.

The Child and Family Wellbeing Fund redefines what “child welfare” means in New York by investing state dollars in local community-based organizations that provide families with basic necessities and supporting formal and informal social structures that serve as enmeshed family and community protective factors, including material supports and mutual aid, activities for children, and peer support groups.

YouthNPower supports this type of fund and encourages the Commission to support similar efforts because it is an example of how we can move beyond plans to “fix the system” to plans that build on what we need to have safe and caring communities for ourselves, our families and our children. Our Collective members seek a new vision that asks, “What do you rely on in your community that helps you thrive?” That could mean investments in mutual aid and support for parents and young people – including help with housing, direct financial support, emergency financial support and guaranteed income, after-school programs, and other relevant, useful resources.

With the broken relationships and trust between communities, families, and systems, the best way to eliminate these harmful cycles is with non-investigative measures, collaboration, and financial support. Families and communities need the space to take initiative – to feel *psychologically* safe when getting help. This can only happen when supports are designed and delivered by people and programs from the community, who are trusted by the community.

## *Unconditional Cash Support*

We know that youth ages 19-24 in the U.S. today are more likely to live in poverty than any other age group.<sup>26</sup> Young people who have experienced foster care are more likely than their peers to face poverty as a result of their time in the child welfare system.<sup>27</sup>

Unconditional economic support is an important part of the future we envision for replacing child welfare. This work is part of a national movement around unconditional financial support, which has been shown to support young people's participation in school and work, improved wellbeing, and promoted housing stability.<sup>28</sup>

We endorse many of the recommendations from the Center for the Study of Social Policy<sup>29</sup> regarding building policy around unconditional financial support for young adults, including those who have experienced the child welfare system, specifically, that such efforts center the following aspects:

- Co-created: Young adults, especially young adults of color, participate in developing the policy.
- Unconditional: Young adults are not subject to any requirements to receive the guaranteed income.
- Unrestricted: Young adults can use the funds to meet their needs in the ways they know best.
- Consistent & Predictable: Income payments would be made in a regular cadence, allowing young adults to plan around a regular income.
- Compatible: Payments should not affect the ability of young person's to receive other forms of local, state and federal benefits.

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<sup>26</sup> Coccia, A. "Supporting Young Adults through a Guaranteed Income." Center for the Study of Social Policy, February 2023. Available at: <https://cssp.org/resource/supporting-young-adults-through-a-guaranteedincome>.

<sup>27</sup> See generally, Courtney, Mark E., et. al. (2011). "Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 26." Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, available at: <https://www.chapinhall.org/wp-content/uploads/Midwest-Eval-Outcomes-at-Age-26.pdf>; Fryar, Garet, et. al. (2017). "Supporting Young People Transitioning from Foster Care: Findings from a National Survey." Child Trends, available at: <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/supporting-young-people-transitioning-foster-care-findings-national-survey>; Cancel, S., Fathallah, S., Nitze, M., Sullivan, S., & Wright-Moore, E. (2020). *Aged out: How we're failing youth transitioning out of foster care*. Think of Us, available at: <https://www.thinkofus.org/case-studies/aged-out>.

<sup>28</sup> See evidence collected across research in Morton, M. H., Chavez, R., Kull, M. A., Carreon, E. D., Bishop, J., Daferede, S., Wood, E., Cohen, L., & Barreyro, P. (2020). *Developing a direct cash transfer program for youth experiencing homelessness: Results of a mixed methods, multi stakeholder design process*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. Available: <https://www.chapinhall.org/wp-content/uploads/Developing-a-Direct-Cash-Transfer-Program-for-Youth.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> Coccia, A. "Supporting Young Adults through a Guaranteed Income." Center for the Study of Social Policy, February 2023. Available at: <https://cssp.org/resource/supporting-young-adults-through-a-guaranteedincome>.

We look forward to building on this collective knowledge around unconditional cash support with learning from our own pilot project in 2024.

## Conclusion

Our written testimony reflects not only the expertise of the YouthNPower: Transforming Care collective members, but also the experience of many young people who experienced the child welfare system in New York City. They, like other young people who have experienced child welfare, are part of the larger community with whom we share solidarity and accountability. We conclude our testimony with a reminder of the complexity of their lives and needs. These young people are primarily Black and Brown, young mothers, LGBTQIA+ youth, and those who have faced homelessness, housing instability and poverty.

Based on our new research from young adults who have aged-out of foster care in New York City<sup>30</sup>, we know that despite the difficult structural and material realities, they also share strong visions and hopes for their futures.

- When asked what they were feeling excited about in their life right now, young people shared dreams of entrepreneurship, education, travel, family, giving back to their communities, and arriving at a place of overall future stability.

They are excited about:

- ...*what my future has for me*
  - ...*the next journey*
  - ...*being a mother to an amazing 3-year-old*
  - ...*applying to school and trying to get back to class*
  - ...*be[ing] alive and free everyday*
  - ...*moving into my own apartment soon*
  - ...*showing my kid that life can be more than what the world is showing him*
- When asked to describe themselves in 3 words, young people overwhelmingly lifted up their strengths and positive qualities.
    - Some top descriptors used were: *kind, strong, independent, smart, beautiful, good parent, hardworking, hopeful, determined, courageous, ambitious*

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<sup>30</sup> Preliminary analysis of YouthNPower survey of 100 youth aged 18-22 who had aged-out of foster care in New York City. Survey respondents reflect a representative sample of youth who have aged-out of foster care in New York City, based on age, race ethnicity, gender and LGBTQIA identity. The survey was conducted in June 2023 among direct cash transfer pilot participants prior to receiving cash payments.

As you consider your findings and recommendations, we urge the Advisory Committee to affirm that youth transitioning out of care must have self-empowerment and self-love so that they can be unapologetically true to themselves. Rather than restrict your inquiry to “disproportionality” or “racial disparity,” we urge you to acknowledge the investments necessary to replace a system that consistently fails young people and families.

We want a connected community where compassion, love, and care help to support us and to share our joy. We can undo the racism that brings Black and Brown youth into foster care and help them thrive by:

- investing in community-designed and driven solutions;
- providing youth transitioning from care with a guaranteed basic income;
- investing in community assets and people instead of interventions and programs through the child welfare apparatus;
- ending the over-surveillance of communities where people of color live;
- addressing the power dynamics and racial profiling within child welfare;
- and ensuring that power is shared with youth in the design, implementation and evaluation of services and policies that are part of any future action in New York.

Thank you for this opportunity to share our thoughts and recommendations with you. If you have any questions about this written testimony, please reach out to our team at:

#### YouthNPower: Transforming Care

YouthNPower is a collaboration of the Children’s Defense Fund-New York, the Public Science Project at the CUNY Graduate Center, the Center for the Study of Social Policy, and New Yorkers For Children.

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