

Five Reasons Why Congress Should Increase Chafee Act Funds to Provide Immediate Support to Older Youth in and Leaving Foster Care During the COVID-19 Pandemic

1. We Can Meet the Urgent Needs of Young People Caused by the Pandemic with an Increase in Chafee Funding of \$500 Million.

A recent poll of current and former foster youth by FosterClub revealed COVID-19 has had a catastrophic impact on young people: **many more young people are in need of services and supports, and their needs—such as housing—require more funds.** Over 220 organizations across the county [support](#) a temporary increase in Chafee funds of \$500 million, which would allow states to meet the increased demand for services and the most urgent needs of foster youth. This funding level would provide temporary financial assistance and crucial support services directly to Chafee-eligible young people during the crisis. The increase of \$500 million would be broken down by allocating \$350 million to Independent Living (IL) services and \$150 million for Education Training Vouchers.

Of the \$350 million, we recommend that funds be directed in the following manner to provides states their traditional flexibility under Chafee, *and* keep a focus on direct assistance to young people who are most in need:

- 65% (or \$227.5 m) would be used for COVID-19 **Emergency Allowances** to provide direct financial assistance to young people who are most in need and who are no longer under the child welfare agency’s responsibility for placement and care. States would have flexibility in identifying the youth most in need and 1. monthly allowances should have a floor of at least \$500 a month for at least 6 months to ensure that they have the necessary supports to make it through the pandemic, and 2. Youth should be eligible until they reach age 26.
- 35% (or \$122.5 m) could be used by the state to address the wide array of needs that youth are confronting during the crisis, including, but not limited to navigating resources, building skills, and providing other supports and case management.
- States should not be required to provide matching funds for the additional \$500 million, consistent with other stimulus relief, and they should have until the **end of FY2021** to spend the funds. This would help get young people at a critical transition to adulthood, who lack stable familial support, through the pandemic and back into school and work.

2. The Current Chafee Funding Level is not Adequate to Meet the Urgent and Growing Needs Associated with the Pandemic.

According to conservative estimates, approximately 186,660 older youth qualify for Chafee funds annually. Under current funding allotments and patterns of service usage, estimates indicate that each eligible child would receive less than \$1,536 in services and/or financial assistance in FFY2020.¹ Prior to the crisis, states were using Chafee funds to provide housing support to just 14% of young people served by Independent Living programs, and provided employment or vocational training to 20% of young people, and only 28% received financial assistance. Recent polls of youth and Independent Living Coordinators² indicate a **significant increase in demand for Chafee-funded services due to the pandemic—including housing, transportation, and basic needs such as food.** They shared the fear that they cannot meet the urgent needs of youth and continue their programs throughout the year. For example:

- Chafee Independent Living Coordinators are reporting a significant increase in requests for help with housing and monetary support, and

¹ Administration for Children and Families, Percent of Youth Receiving Independent Living Services by Type of Service, FY 2016, https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/nytd_data_points_final_services_2016_2018.pdf & [Funding Supports and Services for Young People Transitioning from Foster Care](#) (ChildTrends September 25, 2019).

² [ILC Poll](#) (FosterClub May 21, 2020)

- Three-quarters expected they will need additional resources as demand for assistance increases.

3. Youth in Foster Care, and Those Who are Aging Out, are Struggling to Meet Basic Needs During the Crisis.

In the best of times, older youth in and aging out of foster care without permanent supports face significant barriers. Now, they face overwhelming challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings from a recent poll by FosterClub³ identified the following COVID-19 challenges among the respondents:

- Nearly 1 in 5 have **run out of food**.
- Over half have **lost employment and income**.
- Nearly a quarter **lack stable housing and fear homelessness**.
- More than half **lack contact with a trusted adult** who can support them.

4. The Current Federal Assistance Is Not Reaching Young People in and Leaving Foster Care.

Stimulus funds for individuals, expanded unemployment assistance, and other benefits designed in response to COVID-19 are not reaching eligible young people in and leaving foster care. This is, in part, due to eligibility requirements, but also due to their lack of connection to individuals who can guide them through this complicated process. FosterClub's COVID-19 poll⁴ showed that young people are falling through our current benefits gap. More than half of the young people **had not received a stimulus check** and of those who lost work or work hours and applied for unemployment benefits, **only half received unemployment benefits**.

5. There's a Heavy Price for Not Responding to the Needs of Transition Aged Youth during this Pandemic; The Long Term Benefits of Stepping Up are Clear.

The transition to adulthood is a crucial developmental period when we can make a positive long term impact. We know that providing more robust services during the transition period results in better adulthood outcomes and will reduce social and economic costs long term. The benefit and costs that are avoided will be even greater in this time of crisis when so many youth have urgent, growing needs.

- There's a return on investment of \$4.1 billion per year per cohort of youth aging out of foster care if they were to be supported in achieving outcomes similar to their peers in families.⁵ The gains we see in better outcomes when youth are provided support through extended foster care are great and even a small amount of time in extended care makes a difference.⁶
- When we do not provide transition-aged youth the support all youth need and deserve as they reach adulthood, we put them at great risk for poor outcomes like homelessness and reliance on public assistance.⁷ These costly outcomes will be even greater during a pandemic.

The proposals in this document are endorsed by the following organizations: ACTION Ohio, Center for the Study of Social Policy, Children's Advocacy Institute, Children's Defense Fund, Child Welfare League of America, Children's Rights, First Focus Campaign for Children, FosterClub, Foster Care Alumni of America, Foster Youth in Action, John Burton Advocates for Youth, Juvenile Law Center, National Center for Child Welfare and Housing, Think of Us, Youth Law Center, and Youth Villages. For more information, please contact Jenny Pokempner at jpokempner@jlc.org

³ [The Impact of COVID-19 on Youth from Foster Care A National Poll](#) (FosterClub May 13, 2020).

⁴ [The Impact of COVID-19 on Youth from Foster Care A National Poll](#) (FosterClub May 13, 2020).

⁵ Future Savings: The Economic Potential of Successful Transitions from Foster Care to Adulthood (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2019), <https://www.aecf.org/resources/future-savings/>

⁶ [Supporting Older Youth Beyond Age 18: Examining Data and Trends in Extended Foster Care](#) (ChildTrends June 3, 2019).

⁷ Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Ages 23 and 24 (Chapin Hall 2010).