

THE FOSTERING STABLE HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES ACT

H.R. 2069 – Rep. Michael R. Turner (OH-10)

Current Cosponsors (35 = 17 D + 18 R): *Kildee (MI-05); Langevin (RI-02); Marino (PA-10); Hill (AR-02); Moore (WI-04); Bass (CA-37); Stivers (OH-15); Cicilline (RI-04); Hastings (FL-20); Cole (OK-02); Knight (CA-25); Evans (PA-02); Davis (IL-07); Comstock (VA-10); Faso (NY-19); Meeks (NY-05); MacArthur (NJ-03); Bacon (NE-02); Peters (CA-52); Renacci (OH-16); Upton (MI-06); Dingell (MI-12); Calvert (CA-42); Carson (IN-07); Davidson (OH-08); Denham (CA-10); Lowenthal (CA-47); Brady (PA-01); Johnson (OH-06); Fitzpatrick (PA-08); Davis (IL-13); Wilson (FL-24); Holmes Norton (DC-AL); Jackson Lee (TX-18); Smucker (PA-16)*

Senate Companion — **Leads:** *Grassley (IA); Stabenow (MI)*

Cosponsors (5): *King (ME); Kaine (VA); Franken (MN); Scott (SC); Klobuchar (MN)*

Endorsed in the 114th / 115th Congress by: Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA; supporting an amended version of the legislation); National Center for Housing and Child Welfare; Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption; Family Focused Treatment Association (FFTA); Ohio Youth Advisory Board (YAB) leadership; Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies; Alumni of Care Together Improving Outcomes Now (ACTION) Ohio leadership; Lighthouse Youth Services (Ohio); Center of Vocational Alternatives (COVA) (Ohio); Central Missouri Foster Care & Adoption Association

THE PROBLEM: High rates of homelessness among foster care alumni leading to negative outcomes

In FY2015, the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families estimated that nearly 21,000 youth across the country emancipated (“aged out”) from foster care. Because the government takes on the role of parent for these youth, and also determines when they age out of care, it is equally responsible for supplying adequate support as they make the overnight transition into adulthood so as to prevent government-triggered homelessness. Homeless individuals face extraordinary difficulties across a broad range of life activities, and being homeless is associated with a host of negative outcomes, often straining America’s social safety net and financial resources.

Unfortunately, foster care alumni are one of the most vulnerable, high-risk groups when it comes to homelessness. Studies show that the sudden and permanent transition from foster care to adulthood is a key driver behind homelessness. Nearly one in five foster youth initially surveyed at age 17 reported that by age 19 – at which point 80% were no longer in foster care – they had experienced homelessness during the previous two years. In another study, more than two in five youth endured housing challenges during the two years after exiting foster care, with 20% struggling through chronic homelessness. Former foster children are also disproportionately represented among homeless adult populations. **All told, as many as 37% of foster care alumni have experienced homelessness.** A May 2014 Department of Housing and Urban Development analysis confirmed that, “current research on the outcomes of youth aging out of foster care points to a real need for policy and programs to assist them in maintaining housing. . . .” After all, ***aging out of foster care should not mean aging into homelessness.***

THE SOLUTION: The Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Act

The Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Act presents a straightforward approach that will help break this cycle of homelessness, poverty, and negative outcomes for foster care alumni, offering them enhanced opportunities to become successful, productive members of society. Essentially, **the bill prioritizes minors who are aging out of foster care, and at risk of homelessness, when furnishing housing assistance.** This legislation uses a two-pronged approach that requires **no new spending:**

1. Early application: Minors can apply for housing assistance upon reaching 16 years of age, prior to aging out of foster care.
2. Priority Preference: Six months prior to aging out of foster care, youth will automatically receive a “top-3” priority preference for housing assistance.

Earning the assistance: The Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Act enables those receiving assistance to better themselves, acting as productive citizens and preparing for a successful transition into lifelong independence. **Foster alumni must demonstrate that, within 30 months, they are: (1) pursuing further education; (2) engaged in workforce development or vocational training; or (3) participating in HUD’s Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program.** Employment can also be used to satisfy this “active engagement” requirement. To encourage attainment of self-sufficiency within a reasonable time and to free up housing assistance for each new cohort of foster youth aging out each year, housing assistance under this Act phases out upon reaching age 25.

Bottom Line: Given the parental role the government plays in foster youths’ lives, it has an obligation to prevent government-triggered homelessness within this vulnerable population. Foster care alumni with stable housing and a legitimate chance to establish themselves as they transition into adulthood are more likely to become successful, self-sufficient citizens.

For more information or to cosponsor, contact Dan Hare on Rep. Turner’s staff via e-mail at dan.hare@mail.house.gov.