

# **Bridging the Gap Between Foster Care and Housing**

## **Why Do Children and Teens Enter Foster Care?**

Youth enter foster care for reasons out of their control, such as neglect, abuse and the death of a parent. If the system fails to connect them with permanent connections, these young people age out into the adult world without family support. Nationally, over 20,000 foster youth “age out” each year.

## **What Is the Current Gap Between Foster Care and Housing?**

Youth who age out of foster care face many challenges during the transition to adulthood – but their greatest challenge is achieving housing stability. One in five will become homeless at some point during their lifetime. Having a stable residence is critical when it comes to pursuing employment and higher education.

## **Why Aren't Current Systems Working to Solve This Problem?**

There is a lack of specialized services to engage and empower today's foster youth in acquiring and maintaining stable housing. Homeless shelters are not the right fit for young adults, because they have unique developmental needs. When teens first enter young adulthood after foster care, this is the most effective time to intervene in order to improve outcomes.

## **Why Should We Care?**

It makes no sense for our nation to be able to so clearly identify and anticipate this need, and not to proactively address it. When children are removed from unsafe biological homes, the goal is to ultimately connect them with safety, permanence and well being. After their parental rights are terminated, the government is the only legal parent that these children have. Statistics demonstrate that turning our backs on these children once they turn 18 costs society \$300,000 per youth in social costs including public assistance and lost wages throughout each young person's lifetime.

## **Why Does Homelessness Prevention for This Population Matter?**

Without intervention, the cycle of will continue. The cost will be greater to society in terms of public assistance, because 1 in 4 chronically homeless adults is a former foster child. With the appropriate level of support, information and resources, foster care alumni can be empowered to attain educational achievement and vocational training, and become future leaders and tax-paying citizens. They will have improved educational outcomes and higher earnings, which will lead to increased tax revenues.

## **What's the Solution?**

The *Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Act*, as proposed by Representative Michael Turner (R-OH) is cost-neutral, bipartisan, and relies on existing resources, rather than requiring any new spending. It will create a bridge for former youth, ages 18-25, to access housing opportunities results in stable employment, improved educational prospects and self-sufficiency.

# Supporting Successful Transitions for Youth

## **Listening to Lived Experience of Foster Care Youth and Alumni:**

The concepts contained in the *Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Act* were written and refined over six years by foster care youth and alumni. They volunteered their time to meet with members of Congress, year after year, to create a plan to close the gap between aging out of foster care and being connected with stable housing.

## **Creative Use of Existing Resources:**

The Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Act is cost-neutral, bipartisan, and relies on existing resources, rather than requiring any new spending. The most recent version of this bill includes a method for Public Housing Authorities to issue “vouchers on demand” for foster youth, in order to ensure that the timing of housing vouchers coincides with the date that the young person “ages out” of foster care.

## **Building a Platform for Self-Sufficiency:**

One thing that foster care youth and alumni have been very clear about is that they do not to simply delay homelessness, but to prevent it altogether. Our vulnerable population needs and wants to build a personal platform for self-sufficiency and economic independence. Therefore, this bill has also been crafted to equip foster youth for future success.

If the bill passes, this provision will be available throughout the nation. Local Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) will be provided with a menu of four options to implement, in consultation with public child welfare agencies, in order to help youth participants build a foundation of stability. They can decide:

- 1.) *To mirror the eligibility requirements of extending foster care supports until age 21, as outlined in the 2008 Fostering Connections Act.*
- 2.) *To mirror the eligibility requirements of the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program.*
- 3.) *To mirror the eligibility requirements of HUD’s Family Unification Program–Family Self-Sufficiency Demonstration Program (FUP–FSS Demo).*
- 4.) *To design their own self-sufficiency/active engagement requirement, using elements from Fostering Connections, FSS or the FUP program.*

This empowers local communities to customize the specific wording, in order to best meet the needs of foster youth. And it alleviates fears from other national housing groups that they don’t want to start a precedent of a work “requirement,” in case doing so negatively impacts the populations they serve (i.e. chronically homeless).

## **Positive Youth Development:**

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