



Feds Approve Youth-Led Plan to Provide Housing Vouchers After Foster Care

Update from John Kelly, of the Chronicle of Social Change, July 25, 2019.

Earlier this year, we [reported on the case](#) made by current and former foster youths to use existing authority at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to connect youth aging out of care with housing supports.

The Chronicle of Social Change has learned that, after a thorough review of the policy by HUD's general counsel, the agency is set this week to approve this and notify thousands of public housing authorities.

HUD has yet to publicly comment on these developments. But an event is being planned for this Friday in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, during which Secretary Ben Carson will announce the Foster Youth to Independence initiative.

“I truly believe that in order to improve outcomes for our youth, our people who make the decisions have to be willing and able to listen to the population they are serving,” said Jamole Callahan, one of the former foster youths who helped campaign for the policy. “This solution ... was a simple fix. This is another step towards ending youth homelessness.”

The plan was pitched to HUD by Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities (FSHO) Coalition, whose members met in early March with HUD Secretary Ben Carson to lay out a plan for a \$20 million voucher program. Under that plan, HUD would use an existing pot of money – a federal rental assistance account – to pay for the vouchers.

“We see kids attempt post-secondary and fail just because they don’t have housing,” said Callahan, who helps lead [Foster Action Ohio](#), in an April interview with *The Chronicle of Social Change*. “They have to work to maintain an apartment, then school becomes the background. And it becomes all about survival.”

As per this plan which was crafted by Ohio foster care youth and alumni: A child welfare agency would file paperwork with HUD for what’s called a Family Unification Voucher in the months before a youth aged out. That youth would be tied into HUD’s Family Self-Sufficiency Support program as well, which means the voucher could last up to five years.

After a youth’s voucher is up, it is then “recycled” back to HUD to be used for another youth.

HUD, after reviewing the argument, agreed it is allowable under existing authority and is moving forward on it. The agency did not cap the voucher availability either, which means the total spending on foster youths could exceed \$20 million.

The need for housing supports for foster youth is critical. Anywhere from 20,000 to 25,000 youth age out of care each year in America, and 28 percent experience homelessness by age 21, according to the National Youth in Transition Database. In some states, it's above 40 percent.

In a [recent study based on interviews with 215 young adults](#) who experienced unaccompanied homelessness as youths, foster care was identified as a major factor. Ninety-four out of the 215 interviewees had a history in foster care; of that group of 94, nearly half said entrance into foster care was the “beginning of their housing instability.”

Advocates for the plan are still pursuing federal legislation to codify it into law. The FSHO Act would guarantee a housing voucher starting from emancipation through age 25 for any youth aging out of foster care who could demonstrate the need for a subsidy. The bill is co-sponsored by Reps. Mike Turner (R-Ohio) and Karen Bass (D-Calif.).

