



November 5, 2019

The Honorable Sherrod Brown, Ranking Member
Banking Committee
United States Senate
503 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Sen. Brown,

On behalf of ACTION Ohio, the National Center for Housing and Child Welfare, our partners (attached), and the nearly [55,000 current and former foster youth](#) supporting this bill, we would like to extend our deepest gratitude to you for introducing the “Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Act” (FSHO) in the Senate. Please accept our appreciation as well for holding a hearing to consider the merits of the bill. This youth-written legislation is an important compliment to your recently introduced bill, the “*Housing for Homeless Students Act*,” which corrects a persistent flaw in housing policy that forces veterans, homeless youth, and former foster youth to choose between housing and advancing their education.

FSHO represents a giant step toward synchronizing HUD’s Family Unification Program vouchers with existing child welfare resources in order to close the predictable gaps through which all too many foster children fall into homelessness and human trafficking – saving not only lives but money. The considerable cost benefit associated with stable housing for youth aging out of foster care was affirmed recently by a [research team led by Dr. Dana Prince at Case Western Reserve University](#).

Your staff members, Shilesa Bamberg, Angelique Salizan, and Beth Cooper have met directly with current and former foster youth over the past few years to understand their perspective and ensure that their recommendations and experiences are incorporated into this legislation. In fact, your former staffer Angelique (and alumna of care) who is currently participating in a fellowship in Cleveland, joined the youth to celebrate the Northeast Ohio Thanksgiving Dinner just this past Saturday (November 2).

The young people who designed FSHO have navigated school, work, homelessness, and the world around them without the support of family and with few resources beyond their own industriousness. Few of them will benefit from the changes in housing policy FSHO will usher in; they simply want to improve policy so that their younger “brothers and sisters in care” can avoid a similar fate – and instead offer them a platform for self-sufficiency.

For far too long, the fate of foster children aging out in need of a FUP voucher has been tied to whether they live within the jurisdiction of a Public Housing Authority that has successfully applied for FUP. When viewed in the aggregate; this seems like a typical resource constraint problem, but, from the perspective of one teen alone in the world, facing adulthood without the support of a family, this mismatch is an epic tragedy – and a recipe for homelessness.

Sadly, there are innumerable stories to illustrate this unnecessary suffering. What follows are just a few of the stories and thoughts from Ohio youth – from some of the very youth who designed FSHO:

Michael Outrich (Cuyahoga County, OH) *Michael reentered foster care at age 15. He aged out of the system from a group home placement at age 18. He entered college, but experienced homelessness during college breaks. Due to lack of housing, he slept in an office on campus where he worked on research projects for a college professor.*

After moving off-campus in 2014, he had no cosigner and couldn't get a housing voucher because the wait list was 3 years long. As a result, Michael paid his full years' rent upfront for the next four years to acquire housing. For two of those years after the landlord received payment, the landlord became absentee and wouldn't fix serious issues within the property despite repeated requests to address black mold and other hazardous repair issues. Without the leverage of placing rent in escrow, Michael also lived for six months without a running water in the sink in his unit.

Despite this unnecessary suffering, Michael graduated from Ohio University in 2016 and went on to earn a master's degree in City & Regional Planning from The Ohio State University in 2018. Currently he works for The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at Ohio State where he performs applied social science research.

Jeremy Collier (Clermont County, OH) *Jeremy entered foster care at age ten. He aged out of the system at 18 and had nowhere to go. He entered college, but experienced homelessness during college breaks. Due to lack of housing, he moved back in with his drug-addicted father at one point, but this situation was extremely unsafe. Jeremy persevered and earned a master's degree in Business Administration. He currently serves as a senior internal auditor for Anthem, Inc., and his utmost goal is to help improve outcomes for his brothers and sisters of the foster care system. Jeremy was featured on Channel 12 News (Milford, OH), ["Milford man graduating with MBA after being homeless, in foster care system"](#) on April 26, 2019.*

Brittany Wade (Montgomery County, OH) *Brittany is deeply grateful to have been given the opportunity to receive independent living preparation and to have been connected with a housing resource after foster care. If that program didn't exist, Brittany says she would not have known where to go, "My mom and grandmother died when I was a kid so I didn't have much family with a open door. I see now a lot of homeless teens on the street and a lot of them are former foster youth because they don't have anywhere to go or someone to just help them get started. That was all I needed was some help and I picked it up from there."*

Jonathan Thomas (Lucas County, OH) *"I don't know a lot of young people who are actually ready to leave home when they turn 18. Even those who come from good,*

and stable homes often find themselves having return for a number of reasons – such as finances, relationship trouble, or stress. Now, imagine a young adult who lacks a firm family foundation, or grasp of what it means to be an adult – and imagine them going through the growing pains of becoming an adult completely alone. Imagine the choices they would make simply due to the fact that there isn't that strong continuity of parental relationship in their lives..”

Jonathan cares deeply about how about how trauma can negatively impact the developmental age of a young person who has experienced trauma, abuse and instability. He shares that, “In my opinion, people age differently.... It is for this reason that housing for emancipated foster youth should be paired with emotional support as well. To give them what they might've never have had. To fill in some holes that might keep them from turning to crime, suicides, drugs, alcohol, or whatever. “He described how having to pioneer through pain, rejection and heartache can strengthen some young people – but it can break others.

Centorra Frederick (Franklin County, OH) *“What I would say if given the opportunity is that I would tell the US Senate this: Lack of housing for those who age out of the foster care system poses as a threat to the successful transition to independence and stability for young adults. I was one of those young adults who were promised help for transitional housing after aging out of the system that I've been a part of since a child, that were denied the opportunity to receive those services for whatever the reasons were at the time.*

It was because of the lack of independent housing that I had to experience homeless and instability while starting college. I lived with friends and family members of those friends while trying to better myself. I must say that that was extremely difficult to go through emotionally, physically, socially, psychologically, and spiritually to name a few. It was nothing but the grace of God and my relationship with Him that I was able to make it through this rough season without losing my mind, integrity, and life. Were there temptations presented before me that would've helped me to quickly solve my problems of housing, yes, however, those temptations come with a very high price that I was not willing to pay. I cannot say that everyone always makes the best choices when it comes to survival. There were peers that aged out of the system right along with me that did not say, “No” to those temptations out there and found themselves living a different type of life that could have probably been avoided if more thought, provision and resources were provided by the government to take care of those whom they've been given legal custody over.

Think of the emotional (and other types of) trauma(s) and vulnerabilities a young adult aging out of the system can experience during this time of their lives can be placed in. If the government is going to step in and take care of the youth whose families may not have been able to do so for whatever the reason then they should not have a standard for themselves, that would be any less than the standard they put on parents and other families for their children. Standards such as, college funding, teaching and provision to live independently, provide housing and the tools

to ensure that if for any reason the young adult has fallen through the cracks, it was not due to the fundamental provisions that were made available.

Housing is an imperative preventive measure for young adults aging out of foster care becoming at risk again. Housing also helps ensure the continued stability for young adults aging out of the system have a home, they could now call their own."

These former foster youth and their peers share the gift of their stories with the expectation that offering this painful, personal information will accelerate the pace at which we improve circumstances for their younger brothers and sisters in care. It means a great deal that you have honored their experience and recommendations by championing the "The Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Act" in the Senate. Of course, given your unwavering commitment to ending homelessness and improving the lives of marginalized youth throughout Ohio, it was no surprise to any of us, most especially the Ohio Youth Advisory Board, that you found a place on an already full agenda for this request from foster youth – but we are immensely grateful nonetheless.

Thank you for all that you do as a leader of the Banking Committee to protect and expand housing and economic opportunities for people throughout the United States including America's unaccompanied youth.

If there is anything we can do to help move this legislation forward, please don't hesitate to contact Ruth White at 202-270-7336 or rwhite@nchcw.org.

With admiration and appreciation,



Ruth White, MSSA
Executive Director, NCHCW



Jamole Callahan, BA
Director of Training & Development, ACTION Ohio

Enc.: FSHO Supporting Organizations



ACTION Ohio
All Saints Church Foster Care Project
Alliance for Children's Rights
AspireMN
Benchmarks
Bethany Christian Services
Bethesda Clinic
California Alliance of Child and Family Services
California Youth Connection
Child Welfare League of America
Children's Alliance of Kansas
Children's Defense Fund
Children's Home Society of America
Coalition for Family & Children's Services in Iowa
Coalition on Human Needs
Community Legal Services of Philadelphia
El'lesun
Elevating Connections
Elon Homes and Schools for Children Inc
First Focus Campaign for Children
Forward Steps Foundation
Foster Alumni Mentors
Foster Care Alumni of America
Foster Care C.A.N.
Foster Focus
Foster-U
FosterClub
Fostering Change Network LLC
Franklin county children services
Friends of Children
Health Education and Legal Assistance Project
HEAR US Inc.

Columbus, OH
Pasadena, CA
Los Angeles, CA
St Paul, MN
Raleigh, NC
Grand Rapids, MI
Wheaton, IL
Sacramento, CA
Oakland, CA
Washington, DC
Topeka, KS
Washington, DC
Chicago, IL
Des Moines, IA
Washington, DC
Philadelphia, PA
Columbus, OH
Denver, CO
North Carolina
Washington, DC
Broomfield, CO
Grand Junction, CO
Chicago, IL
Cooper, TX
Watsonstown, PA
Norfolk, VA
Seaside, OR
Bowie, MD
Columbus, Oh
Hadley, MA
Philadelphia, PA
Naperville, IL



iFoster
Illinois Collaboration on Youth
John Burton Advocates for Youth
Juvenile Law Center
Larue Associates, LLC
LIFE Skills Foundation
Massachusetts Alliance For Families
MCYS - Bridgeway Shelter
Methodist home
Monarch
National Association of Counsel for Children
National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials
National Center for Housing & Child Welfare
National Crittenton
National Network for Youth
National Nurse-Led Care Consortium
Office of Homeless Services (OHS)
Ohio Children's Alliance
OHIO YAB
Parents Anonymous Inc
Pennsylvania Council of Children, Youth and Family Services
Philadelphia Nurse-Family Partnership
Philadelphia Nurse-Family Partnership
Project HOME
Public Health Management Organization
Safe Harbor Orphan Care
SchoolHouse Connection
StandUp For Kids
The International Institute Of Family Development
The Purple Project
The SAFE Alliance
Turning Points for Children
Truckee, CA
Chicago, IL
San Francisco, CA
Philadelphia, PA
Baltimore, MD
Durham, NC
Boston, MA
Conroe, TX
Raleigh, NC
Albemarle, NC
Denver, CO
Washington, DC
College Park, MD
Portland, OR
Washington, DC
Philadelphia, PA
Philadelphia, Pa
Columbus, OH
Columbus OH
Claremont, CA
Harrisburg, PA
Philadelphia, PA
Philadelphia, PA
Philadelphia, PA
Philadelphia, PA
Marysville, OH
Washington DC
Irvine, CA
Baltimore, MD
Shaker Heights, OH
Austin, TX
Philadelphia, PA



Turning Points for Children
Wilkes County DSS
Windswept Isles Consulting
WV Child Care Association
Youth Homes of Mid-America
Youth Service, Inc.
YSS.org

Philadelphia, PA
Wilkesboro NC
Langley, WA
Charleston, WV
Johnston, IA
Philadelphia, PA
Ames, IA