



November 5, 2019

The Honorable Chuck Grassley, Chair
Committee on Finance
United States Senate
135 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Sen. Grassley,

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 also express our appreciation to your staff member, Liesel Crocker, who has been in regular communication with the Mr. Turner’s office regarding the progress of the bill. We hope that the Senate will introduce and pass FSHO with the same expediency demonstrated in 1999 with the passage of the John H. Chafee Independence Act. This is such a poignant way to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Sen. Chafee’s legacy.

FSHO was written by foster care alumni trained through the vast network of grassroots organizations you set out to create when you co-founded the Senate Caucus on Foster Youth with Sen. Landrieu in 2009. Through Caucus events, these young people were not only given a platform to illuminate the incredible hardship placed upon them, first by their families, and second by a system that failed to prepare them adequately for adulthood – they learned to draft solutions and contribute to child welfare reform. In the case of FSHO, they also answered your call to improve collaboration between public agencies in order to improve the transition to adulthood.

More specifically, FSHO emerged from an event that has been going on for the past six years called “Three Days on the Hill” which brings current and former foster youth to DC to discuss federal policy. The event and the associated training are organized by ACTION Ohio which was founded by three volunteers: Lisa Dickson, a full-time librarian; Jamole Callahan, a young business professional; and Doris Edelman, a retired 30-year veteran of child welfare work. Lisa is an alumna who aged out in 1989 and at that time experienced her own set of housing challenges. Jamole is also an alumnus.

The teens and young adults who participate in this annual event understand that policymaking takes time and, thus, they will be unlikely to benefit from any improvements. Yet, they take time off of work and school, study the issues, and come to Capitol Hill prepared to express gratitude when Congress gets it right, offer the gift of their personal stories, and share suggestions from their unique vantage point - and what a unique vantage point indeed.

Contributions to the literature by outstanding ethnographers like Matthew Desmond¹ notwithstanding, the only way to inform policy based on experience is to personally navigate the intersection between public systems as if your life depended upon it – not just your research. This is the reason why youth identified the obvious synchronization flaws and geographic disparities within HUD’s Family Unification Program but the professional class did not.

These flaws are severe and must be addressed. The fate of a foster child aging out in need of a FUP voucher is tied to whether or not they live in the jurisdiction of a PHA that has successfully applied for FUP and whether or not the availability of a voucher is synchronized with their emancipation. Currently, 197 of the 3,400 PHAs administer FUP. This is not for lack of interest. The last fiscal year that HUD announced funding for FUP, nearly 400 PHAs applied, but HUD had funding for only 32 awards².

When viewed in the aggregate; this seems like a typical resource constraint problem, but, as pointed out earlier, 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.

ACTION Ohio worked with NCHCW to bring these these concerns and a straightforward, yet sophisticated solution to the Ohio Congressional delegation via foster youth champion Rep. Michael Turner and his partner in refining the legislation, Rep. Karen Bass (the founder and co-chair of the Congressional Caucus on Foster Youth). Over the past two years, we considered generous feedback from national advocacy and trade associations including the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the Public Housing Authority Directors Association, the National Low-Income Housing Coalition, and the Children’s Defense Fund. As a result, we arrived at the most recent, final version of FSHO which quite simply:

- offers a three-year Family Unification Program Housing Choice Voucher Housing to all young people leaving foster care who are at risk of homelessness, properly-timed with their emancipation
- eliminates geographic disparities by offering a voucher to youth regardless of where they live
- offers youth the opportunity to extend the voucher by two years (for a total of five) by voluntarily participating in self-sufficiency activities.

While FSHO will allow child welfare agencies to add a viable and predictable housing option for young people emancipating from foster care who are at risk of homelessness – we predict that the number of young people who participate will be a fraction of the youth aging out of care.

¹ Desmond, Matthew. 2016. *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*. New York: Crown.

² Dworsky, A. Napolitano, L. & Courtney, M. (2013). Homelessness During the Transition From Foster Care to Adulthood. *American Journal of Public Health*. 103(Suppl 2): S318–S323. DOI: 10.2105/AJPH.2013.301455

In 2014, the U.S. Children’s Bureau reported that five percent of all 415,129 children in foster care had a goal of aging out into independence. During 2014, nine percent of the 238,230 children who exited the foster care system aged out – or a total of 21,440 young people³.

It is not the case that all young people would transition to a Housing Choice Voucher or a public housing unit. Instead, we predict that due to recent changes to child welfare law under the “Families First and Prevention Services Act of 2018” and proper utilization of foster care resources, the most likely candidates for these housing resources will be 21 year old youth who are at risk of homelessness, not the entire portfolio of youth aging out. (Assuring that child welfare agencies maximize existing resources and properly time and support FUP/FSHO referrals will no doubt warrant a hearing and the encouragement of the Senate Committee on Finance. We are available to help your office plan for a hearing on this topic.)

The most recent AFCARS report indicates that the total number of 21-year-olds in care is in 2016 was 2,129. It is a portion of this group of young adults would transition from independent living programs into a subsidy administered by a PHA after having been adequately prepared for adulthood, connected to work, and self-sufficiency services.

We are so proud of the fact that FSHO offers a platform for economic self-sufficiency at the youths’ request. Through the provision of housing resources, the bill would close the yawning gap between the wages that youth are qualified to earn and the cost of decent housing. The most comprehensive longitudinal study of former foster youth shows that 48 percent of 26-year-olds work fulltime but their annual earnings are \$13,989. This is less than half the annual earnings of their non-foster care alumni peers of \$32,312⁴.

This bill does more than just close that gap on the housing subsidy side – it encourages the kinds of activities that will bolster income as well for the purpose of earning an extra two years of eligibility. This emphasis on self-sufficiency is a continuous thread in survey data of youth dating back to the seminal Festinger survey of 1983, aptly entitled, “No one ever asked us.”⁵ Year after year, former foster youth express a complete disappointment with the lack of attention by public agencies to economic self-sufficiency for youth.

Alumni of care routinely describe a last-minute, frantic, and crisis-driven aging out process that relies heavily on emergency services such as homeless shelters and loose

³ United States. (1990). The AFCARS report. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau.

⁴ Okpych, N. & Courtney, M. (2014). Does education pay for youth formerly in foster care? Comparison of employment outcomes with a national sample. *Children and Youth Services Review*. 43 (2014) 18–28

⁵ Festinger, T. (1983). *No one ever asked us*. Columbia University Press: New York, NY

connections of friends they might stay with temporarily. While a law student at American University, former foster youth, Farrah Champagne, Esq. published a 2014 law review article entitled Providing Proper Preparation: Achieving Economic Self-Sufficiency for Foster Youth⁶. She shares some of these unimaginable stories and her legal finding indicates that public systems of care fail so miserably to prepare youth that state actors can and should be held liable in court.

FSHO emphasizes the responsibility of the child welfare and housing systems to make self-sufficiency services available to youth. In many ways FSHO is not only a call to action from America's foster youth, it is a natural development in the evolution of the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program – and hence we are quite anxious for FSHO to become law.

We will never be able to adequately thank you for all you have done to lift up the voices of foster youth from across the U.S. on all of their issues and concerns but we are particularly grateful for your willingness to shepherd their elegant solution to their housing and economic security challenges. Attached please find a list of organizations who join us in thanking you for introducing FSHO in the Senate.

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

⁶ Champagne, Farrah. "Providing Proper Preparation: Achieving Economic Self-Sufficiency for Foster Youth." American University Labor & Employment Law Forum 4, no. 1 (2014): 2-45.



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