



Talking Points: “Fostering Futures”—Virginia should provide strong transition services up to age 21 for youth aging out of foster care and older youth adopted from foster care.

- While Virginia has the lowest rate of youth coming *in* to foster care of all states, we have among the highest rate of youth who “age out” at 18 before we connect them with a permanent family, either through reunifying with their parents, connecting with a relative who can take custody, or adoption.
- One of the most valuable resources—if not THE most valuable resource—we must provide to a young person in foster care is a safe, permanent family: a support that lasts well beyond even age 21.

The current system results in poor outcomes for too many youth who age out of foster care:

- When youth “age out” of foster care, we fail them, and we put our investment in them at great risk. National studies (e.g. the Chapin Hall “Midwest Study”) confirm what already fear to be true: youth who “age out” of care are at much greater risk of devastating outcomes: homelessness, unemployment (twice as likely as the general population), school dropout (over 3x as likely as general population), court involvement, poor health, and teen pregnancy.
- Without supports until age 21, youth who “age out” are also nearly 3x as likely to be homeless as their peers in care who received additional support.

The “Fostering Futures” program is a smart investment in youth that will build a stronger workforce and healthier communities:

- WITH supports until age 21, youth who “age out” of care double the likelihood of being employed or in school at age 19. They are twice as likely to have completed at least a year of college by 21, and more likely to have health insurance and access needed health care. Young women who continued support to age 21 saw a 38% reduction in incidence of pregnancy before age 20.¹
- **Cost:** The cost to Virginia is minimal: **a General Fund expenditure of under \$2 million over the biennium would allow us to draw down approximately \$3.8 million in federal funds and fully implement this program.** In addition to better

¹ <http://www.jimcaseyyouth.org/sites/default/files/documents/Issue%20Brief%20-%20FC%20to%2021.pdf>

preparing youth who age out of care for independence, this program is anticipated to **double the number of older youth adoptions** we complete each year. In subsequent years, our state costs are projected to stay at around \$2 million/year, while federal supplemental funding would **increase to approx. \$4-\$5 million/year**.

- The Jim Casey Initiative has estimated that the financial benefits of this model program outweigh the cost by a factor of 2 to 1.

Without such transition supports for youth aging out of care, we're paying more in the long run:

- The Jim Casey Initiative estimates the "cost of doing nothing" for these young people at \$300,000 per youth over the 3-year life of the program, meaning the 514 youth who "aged out" of foster care in 2015 could cost the state and taxpayers \$154.2 million for expenses such as lost tax revenue, additional safety net subsidies, criminal justice costs, and health, homelessness & unemployment services.

The "Fostering Futures" model is a proven effective program:

- 22 states and the District of Columbia have all opted in to the Fostering Connections provision to broaden transition services for youth and are seeing successful results.
- The data collection requirement helps to keep the program accountable, both to youth and to state budgets. We do not have a robust accountability standard for our current local/state Independent Living program, so "Fostering Futures" will improve our efforts in that regard, too.

The "Fostering Futures" model provides equity and fairness to all youth across the Commonwealth who age out of foster care:

- The program would be funded by state and federal dollars, with very little local contribution through the Children's Services Act, meaning: access to this breadth of services will not be "zip code dependent" for youth. A young person in Southwest Virginia should be provided the same level of support as a young person in Fairfax.

In short, through "Fostering Futures," Virginia would be able to better serve youth aging out of care, equally across the Commonwealth, with comprehensive supports that build a "bridge to independence" for youth who face significant challenges and risks if left on their own at age 18.

Background on the proposed program:

- **What is this proposal?** “Fostering Futures” is the name given to the proposed enhancement of transition services for youth aging out of foster care and adoption assistance for older youth adopted from foster care up to age 21 under the federal Fostering Connections Act. The program’s name was chosen by a group of youth involved in the Project Life independent living program.
- **What happens currently?** In Virginia currently, youth leave the formal foster care system at age 18, if not before, generally speaking. Those youth who opt in to the *current* 18-21 Independent Living program (funded through the Children’s Services Act, some local funds, and very limited federal Chafee funds) do so through an independent agreement (somewhat like a contract) developed between the youth and their local department of social services. This program **does not** include housing costs; instead, some services are provided (varies locally) and a monthly stipend is available (base rate: \$660/mo), which must cover living expenses such as rent, utilities, other bills like phone and transportation, etc.
- **How it works:** Through the “Fostering Futures” program, Virginia would opt in to a provision of the federal Fostering Connections Act to access additional federal “IV-E” funding to provide a greater breadth of supports to youth aging out of foster care **and** youth adopted from foster care at age 16 or older, both up until age 21. Virginia would be able to draw down matching federal funds for things like housing and daily care costs (which are not currently covered) for these youth.
- **Cost:** The cost to Virginia is minimal: **Just over this biennium, a General Fund expenditure of under \$2 million would allow us to draw down approximately \$3.8 million in federal funds and fully implement this program.** In addition to better preparing youth who age out of care for independence, this program is anticipated to **double the number of older youth adoptions** we complete each year. In subsequent years, our state costs are projected to stay at around \$2 million/year, while federal supplemental funding would **increase to approx. \$4-\$5 million/year.**
- **What is the adoption piece?** In Virginia, we have around 160-180 youth in care in the 16-17 age range with adoption as a goal. Many of these youth simply age out of care at 18 before an adoptive family is found and an adoption completed. In 2015, we completed just over 30 such adoptions. Under the “Fostering Futures” program, adoption assistance is available up to age 21 for youth who are adopted from foster care at age 16 or older (includes youth up to age 21, as ‘adult adoptions’ are permissible in Virginia). One of the most valuable resources—if not THE most valuable resource—we can offer a young person in foster care is a permanent family: a support that lasts well beyond even age 21.