

Support “Fostering Futures”: Transition Services for Youth Who “Age Out” of Foster Care & Adoption Assistance for Older Youth to Age 21

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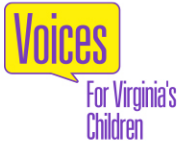
HB 203 (Lingamfelter/Peace), HB 935 (Toscano) SB 436 (Favola)



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From 2008 to 2015, more than 5375 youth “aged out” of Virginia’s foster care system, meaning they turned 18 years old before being connected to a permanent family through adoption, returning home to parents, or having a relative take custody of them. The Jim Casey Initiative reports that young people who age out of foster care without permanent connections experience very poor outcomes compared to their peers in the general population:

- More than one in five will become homeless after age 18
- Only 58% will graduate high school by age 19 (compared to 87% of all 19 year olds)
- One in four will be involved in the justice system within two years of leaving the foster care system
- Fewer than 3% will earn a college degree by age 25 (compared to 28% of all 25 year olds)

There are tremendous benefits to Virginia extending such supports to this population that go well beyond financial savings. **Youth who continue to receive services after age 18:**

- Are two to three times more likely to be enrolled in college and less likely to be evicted than those who discontinue services at 18;
- Are more likely to avoid homelessness, school dropout, and incarceration, as well as avoid the need for further and longer-term public assistance.
- Are more likely to have health insurance and to seek health and mental health treatment and therapy when needed.

The federal Fostering Connections Act allows states to extend foster care supports to youth until age 21 ** (including housing) **** and receive federal IV-E matching funds for doing so.** The program also allows adoption assistance to continue for any youth adopted at age 16 or older, which will help increase older-youth adoptions—a group of youth most in danger of “aging out.”

It’s also important to note: youth must be in school, working, or involved in a job training/job skills program to access these services.

Jim Casey Initiative estimates the “cost of doing nothing” for these young people at \$300,000 per youth, meaning the 514 youth who “aged out” of foster care in 2015 could cost the state and taxpayers \$154.2 million.

Opting in to this program would mean a small General Fund expenditure over the biennium of just under \$2 million, which would allow Virginia to draw down close to **\$4 million in new, additional IV-E funds over that same biennium to help these vulnerable youth.**

This program is meant to function as a critical backstop, in conjunction with efforts to reduce the number of youth aging out of care, recognizing that youth who do age out are often without stable, adult mentors and other social capital that our investment in their time in the foster care system was meant to, but failed to address.