



Increase Chafee Funds to Protect and Support Foster Care Youth

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the failure of the child welfare system to appropriately prepare older youth for adulthood. Each year, [nearly 20,000 children “age out” of the child welfare system](#), reaching adulthood without the security, consistency, and support of a permanent family. When children are thrust into adulthood without that support, they have worse outcomes and are confronted with obstacles no young person should face alone. In ordinary times, youth who age out of care [experience high rates of homelessness and poor educational attainment](#); these outcomes are exacerbated by the current crisis.

Across the country, youth from foster care are losing their jobs and their homes and are facing serious food and economic insecurity without the support of family, yet Congress has failed to provide them with relief. Congress must act now to provide \$500 million in emergency funding for the John H. Chafee Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood to ensure these youth with unique needs are not left behind.

As her parents struggled with addiction, [Destiny Moura](#) of New York, NY was left vulnerable, falling victim to trafficking at age 14. In “the life,” as she came to call it, Destiny received the security she never got at home or in foster care, but at 18 she made the conscious decision to get out and change her life. She entered extended foster care, completed a high school equivalency program and enrolled at Borough of Manhattan Community College, where she has maintained a 3.4 GPA. Originally commuting into the city from her group home, Destiny was able to secure her own apartment, but when COVID hit, she was given only two days to pack up and move. In June 2020, Destiny is set to age out of foster care and lose nearly all of the support she receives from the child welfare system. Despite doing everything right and overcoming nearly insurmountable odds, she now stands to lose everything.

Current Support for Transition-Age Youth Falls Short.

The John H. Chafee Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee) is a collection of services delivered concurrently to help prepare older youth for life after foster care. In addition to preparation for adult living, Chafee funds can be used to provide for youths’ immediate needs for housing, food, and other critical support services to help stabilize their lives.

The program has never been sufficiently funded to meet the needs of transition-age youth. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the resources allocated to the Chafee program were unable to meet the needs of older youth in care and many states had long waiting lists of youth needing assistance. Though Congress has repeatedly expanded the pool of youth eligible for Chafee services and the breadth of services the program can provide, they have not matched these

expansions with increased funding. Funding for the Chafee program remained flat at \$140 million from its inception in 1999 until just this year, when it saw only a \$3 million increase. **For the 112,000 youth who receive Chafee services each year, [that means just \\$1,536 per youth each year to provide services and financial assistance for their transition to adulthood, including administrative costs.](#)** Under pandemic conditions, it is expected that a far greater percentage of the estimated 186,000 Chafee-eligible youth will need to access services, stretching these insufficient funds even further.

Failure to invest in the Chafee program falls especially heavy on Black youth, who are [far more likely](#) to be in the system as teenagers or young adults than their white peers—more than three times as likely in nearly half of all states. After receiving dramatically underfunded services, Black youth age out of the

system at a rate that is 10 percent higher than white youth. [In the years after aging out](#), they are less likely to be connected to adults, more likely to face homelessness and more likely to have been incarcerated than their white peers.

Older Youth Need More Support Now Than Ever Before.

Transition-age youth are uniquely vulnerable during this pandemic, as they lack the resources and connections most young adults rely on to weather crises. In [a recent survey of youth from foster care](#), [more than half reported](#) facing food insecurity, while

nearly one in five reported having run out of food entirely. They face significant economic insecurity; over 65 percent had seen their working hours cut or lost their jobs entirely, and only 37 percent had any family—legal or chosen—to lean on.

Providers that administer Chafee services [report](#) significant increases in requests for housing and financial support since the beginning of the COVID crisis, and three in four expect that their need for resources will further increase over time. Many states held back from providing extra resources to youth due to concerns that funding will run out and be unable to cover non-COVID related Chafee services.

As universities across the country closed due to the coronavirus, many youth lost their housing. Even on campuses that allowed students to stay in the dorms, youth lost their on-campus jobs, the meal plans they rely on for food, and access to on-campus transportation services like shuttle buses that they rely on to get groceries and other basic supplies. **“As foster youth, we already have to beat the odds to attend college,”** explains [Rimy Morris](#), a youth in extended foster care in Indiana. **“Now we’re facing challenges that threaten to derail all of our hard work.”**

Current Pandemic Efforts Are Not Reaching Transition-Age Youth.

Despite their extraordinary needs and our crucial responsibility to support them, youth from foster care have been left out of the Congressional response to the pandemic. While certain provisions related to the needs of older youth were included in the House proposal for the CARES Act—including a temporary funding increase of roughly \$43 million for Chafee services and \$18 million for Education and Training Vouchers—these measures were not included in the final bill signed into law. The same provisions were included in the House-passed HEROES Act—this time with a \$50 million increase for the Chafee program—which has yet to be taken up by the Senate. Even if these proposed measures are included in the next relief package, they fall far short of meeting the needs of young people navigating this pandemic.

Further, youth from foster care are not benefiting from the assistance programs Congress created through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act or the CARES Act. [In recent polling](#), **52 percent of youth from foster care did not receive a stimulus check** to help them pay rent or meet basic needs. With an absence of social support, many youth struggle to access social services, with 37.4 percent of youth reporting they don’t know how to apply

for unemployment. Of those who lost work and did apply for unemployment benefits, 50 percent did not receive them.

Congress Must Provide \$500 Million in Supplemental Chafee Funds to Support Older Youth From Foster Care.

An emergency infusion of \$500 million to the Chafee program would allow states to provide for the immediate needs of youth who may lose their jobs and their homes and who are struggling to meet even their most basic needs during this pandemic. Though historically underfunded, the Chafee program has shown itself to be the most capable mechanism for providing support services that can reach the youth that need them. Chafee providers [overwhelmingly report](#) that they are prepared to utilize additional funds.

Congress can—and *must*—act swiftly to meet the needs of older youth from foster care. **We urge Congress to include the Child Welfare Emergency Assistance Act (S. 4172) in the next COVID relief package.** [The bill](#), which was introduced in the Senate by Senators Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Kamala D. Harris (D-CA), Bob Casey (D-PA), and Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), would provide \$500 million in one-time emergency Chafee funding with no

state match requirement. The bill would also lift the cap on the percentage of funds that can be spent on housing supports and would suspend the requirement that youth must be in school or working to receive education and training vouchers for the duration of the crisis.

To most effectively meet the needs of older youth from foster care, **Congress should dedicate 65 percent of emergency funds for Chafee independent living services to providing living stipends to youth who are falling through the cracks** of other responses to the pandemic. With \$500 million in additional funds, the Chafee program would be able to support youth who were not able to access other COVID supports with a \$500 per month living stipend for at least six months, while providing enhanced assistance with immediate needs to all youth who need them.

Additionally, further measures must be taken to support older youth from care. **The Child Welfare Emergency Assistance Act would provide crucial supports to make sure that older youth are not unwillingly ejected from foster care during the pandemic.** [The bill](#) would temporarily alter child welfare regulations to:

- **Suspend the participation requirements for extended foster care.** In states that have extended Title IV-E foster care beyond 18, youth must participate in certain education, work, or training activities. The bill would temporarily suspend these requirements, which are overly burdensome in the face of school and business closures, so youth will not lose access to vital services.
- **Place a moratorium on discharges from the foster care system.** The bill would allow all youth who were in foster care or eligible for Chafee services to continue to receive those services, so that they are not abruptly cut off from necessary supports during the pandemic. It would allow states to continue accessing federal Title IV-E funds for these programs.

Once the Crisis Is Over, Youth From Foster Care Need Permanent Policy Reform.

While the Chafee program is the most effective program to deliver support to older youth during

this crisis, our young people never should have been this vulnerable in the first place. Substantial reforms are needed for the Chafee program and the child welfare system as a whole. More work is needed to ensure that prevention services and programs are tailored to address the unique needs of older youth at risk of entering care, that services for youth in care are designed to connect them to permanency more promptly, and that post-permanency services are in place to help ensure those youth are not at risk of reentry. These reforms must be anti-racist in nature and must directly confront the disproportionate representation of youth of color in the system and disparities in both the treatment they receive and the outcomes they experience.

It is time to re-conceptualize what it means to deliver services to transition-age youth. This means not just extending care to 21 and Chafee services to 23 for youth in all states, but transforming extended care into a system that truly addresses the unique needs of transition-age youth and provides them the skills, resources, and connections they need to be successful in adulthood. This requires first adequately funding the Chafee program to meet the needs of youth in the program. It also requires ensuring that the increased funds are going to programs that deliver results for youth. We support the [Increasing Opportunities for Former Foster Youth Act \(S. 3025\)](#), introduced by Senators Chuck Grassley (R-IA) and Ron Wyden (D-OR), which moves to identify and evaluate programs that are most successful at serving transition-age youth.

Reforming the services provided to older youth isn't just a step toward fulfilling our responsibility to youth in foster care. It also is a financial investment in the capabilities of these young people and their contributions to our country. [A recent study from the Annie E. Casey Foundation](#) found that **if young people transitioning from foster care had similar outcomes to their peers in the general public, \$4.1 billion per cohort year would be saved** due to an increase in high school completion and a decrease in early parenthood, homelessness, and incarceration. We have a special responsibility to these young people and it is imperative that we take steps now to fully support them both during the COVID-19 pandemic and long after it ends.