



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
330 C Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

October 12, 2021

Dear Child Welfare Community,

I am writing to you once again to urge your proactive efforts to engage and serve young people in foster care and formerly in foster care. We have a collective responsibility to ensure that young people exiting foster care and after-care services are able to do so in a planned, youth-driven way.

September 30, 2021, marked the expiration of critical flexibilities and protections for older youth in foster care included in the Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act, enacted as Division X of P.L. 116-260, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021.

The Children's Bureau has heard - both from young people and the agencies that serve them - that Division X has been a critical lifeline. We are encouraged that Congress is continuing to explore how the federal government can support the needs of youth in foster care and young adults formerly in foster care and it is possible that some provisions of Division X may be reinstated in the coming weeks. We will continue to keep you informed of any future legislative action. In the meantime, here are some suggestions of what you can do now.

Maintain Contact and Supports for the Next Six Months For Youth Leaving Foster Care.

The first six months following a young person's transition from the foster care system are often the most precarious. Over the next six months, I ask the child welfare community to be proactive in reaching out to, engaging, and assisting young people who have made a planful transition from foster care in the last few weeks or who will do so in the coming days. As we know, young people are transitioning into a very challenging world.

From conversations with officials in states and communities, we know that for many young people in foster care or receiving services under the moratorium on aging out of foster care and other flexibilities of Division X, the turning of the calendar to October 1, 2021 did not result in disruptions in their living situations. This is because states have been planning for the expected expiration of Division X flexibilities and have chosen to pursue other available flexibilities, including exercising the Chafee program option to serve youth up to age 23, requesting flexibilities under the Stafford Act, and working with philanthropy and community providers to ensure youth receive seamless services and supports. However, CB has also heard in recent days about concerning situations some young people are finding themselves in-- without a concrete plan or information on resources since the ending of the moratorium on aging out of foster care. Without information and resources, young people are at great risk of homelessness and other precarious situations. A young person should never leave foster without a concrete plan for stable housing and access to immediate resources if the housing plans need to change.

The circumstances and situations of young people can change quickly and that is why we are asking you to develop a specific contact and outreach plan for the youth leaving foster care, including identifying who is best positioned to maintain that meaningful contact, whether it be a caseworker, an advocate, a kinship or foster caregiver, or peer. We know from best practices in the transition planning process that having access to multiple options for support over a longer period of time is critical for their success. While some federal resources to support young people may no longer be available in your state, we always expect states to contact young people and to work with them to identify how to access the resources they need to make a supported and successful transition out of foster care.

Connect Young People to Other Federal Resources.

In addition to exploring funding and supports available through the child welfare agency, I urge you to help young people access other available supports.

Emergency Rental Assistance. As I wrote about in my recent [letter](#), there are other federal resources to support housing for young people, including the Emergency Rental Assistance. I urge you to connect with the agencies and providers at the state and local community to connect young people to this resources. In addition, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s [Foster Youth to Independence](#) (FYI) and the [Family Unification Program](#) (FUP) are other housing resources available.

Child Tax Credit. The [Child Tax Credit](#) in the American Rescue Plan provides the largest Child Tax Credit and can be a critical resource for our young parents and families. As of July 15th, 2021, most families are eligible to automatically receiving monthly payments of \$250 or \$300 per child. It is important for child welfare agencies connect young families to the Child Tax Credit to help all families succeed.

Other Resources. There are other federal resources available to young people in transition from foster care but are not specific to them. These include the Economic Impact Payments (stimulus checks), childcare benefits, unemployment benefits, and Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP). We urge you to work one-on-one with young people to ensure they can access these other crucial resources, offer help with the application process, and follow-up to insure they are approved for benefits.

Collect and Maintain Contact Information.

We have discovered many new opportunities from the implementation of Division X. One is that we must have better ways to maintain contact with young people. In October 2010, the implementation of the National Youth In Transition Database (NYTD) survey transformed the way that child welfare engaged with young people from the ages of 18 to 21. We urge child welfare agencies and providers to **collect meaningful contact information** from young people leaving foster care specifically and in general for all young people who have been in contact with you due to resources in Division X.

To obtain meaningful contact information, it is important to let young people know why the agency is collecting the information. In obtaining contact information, we urge agencies to request and/or confirm the contact information of lifelong connections for young people (e.g., kin, foster parents, advocates, relatives, parents, siblings and peers) and record names used on social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter). We also urge you to be proactive in providing young people with information on agency contacts if they have questions or need support. If not already available, we urge you to establish and publicize a toll-free or universal number or website for young people to contact, as future resources and services may become available.

Since the passage of Division X in December 2020, I know the field of child welfare has collectively worked tirelessly to implement resources and services for young people that might have never existed before. I reflect that in our initial guidance on Division X, the Children's Bureau asked you to prioritize the needs of older youth and provide them direct cash assistance. Since then you have worked to pay the rent of young people; assisted them in going back to school to accomplish their educational and employment goals, and helped them to purchase cars, computers, phones and other items they need. You have reached out to individuals to allow them re-enter foster care and you have worked to wrap services around them where they were living to ensure their safety, stability, and well-being. I know the child welfare workforce is fatigued and want to give you my heartfelt thanks for all your efforts. I often hear from young people about how important the relationship with their caseworker or other supportive adult was in order to receive services and supports. By taking care of the workforce we are taking care of young people.

Before closing, I want to note that October 1, 2021 is significant for the child welfare field in another way. That date marks the first day when all states may apply to participate in the title IV-E Prevention Services program and when federal provisions seeking to reduce the child welfare system's reliance on congregate care are required to go into effect nationwide. Successful implementation of these provisions will have a direct and meaningful impact on our collective goals to advance equity and inclusion in the field of child welfare, help ensure that children and youth remain connected to family, and ultimately reduce the number of youth who face aging out of foster care.

Thank you, again, for all your work to support children, youth and families. The Children's Bureau looks forward to our continued partnership. Please let us know how we may best assist you in your work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Aysha E. Schomburg".

Aysha E. Schomburg, Esq.
Associate Commissioner
Children's Bureau