

## **#EmergencyCovidRelief offers ray of hope for #FosterYouth; new poll suggests resources can't come soon enough**

December 23, 2020

Washington, D.C. - Young adults with lived experience in foster care who have been struggling because of the pandemic received some welcome news in yesterday's COVID relief package. The sweeping COVID relief package passed by Congress and awaiting presidential signature includes, among many other things, \$400 million in emergency assistance to youth in and from foster care to help them weather the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our latest [poll](#), published yesterday, suggests the assistance can't come soon enough for young adults in and from foster care.

"Young people who have aged out of foster care, who often lack family support they can count on, have been struggling to keep their head above water during this pandemic," said Celeste Bodner, Executive Director of FosterClub. "A heroic effort was made by young leaders with lived experience in foster care to advocate for the needs of their peers. On their behalf, FosterClub extends deep gratitude to the policymakers who listened and then stepped up to support them."

For the past nine months, FosterClub has been hearing from young people with lived experience in foster care who have been facing extreme challenges in the wake of the pandemic. FosterClub has conducted several polls<sup>1</sup> to learn more about how the pandemic is affecting young people in and from foster care. In this most recent poll, conducted November 24 - December 5, we heard from 474 young people with lived experience in foster care who shared how they are faring during this pandemic.

Similar to earlier findings, the latest poll demonstrates how COVID-19 has negatively affected young people with lived foster care experience, from causing housing and employment loss, to food insecurity, to facing health care challenges and extreme isolation. Many of these young adults from foster care do not have significant relationships they can rely on for financial or emotional support.

*Foster youth often feel alone and unsupported. It really takes a toll on mental health when I have to wake up every day trying to figure out what I need to do to barely survive.*

*-20-year-old with lived experience in foster care from Oregon*

Perhaps not surprisingly, young people between the ages of 18 and 24 who are still in foster care report having more information, greater access to resources, and better housing stability than those no longer in care. This finding underscores the growing understanding in the field of child welfare about

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<sup>1</sup> FosterClub conducted a poll in late March ([results here](#)) and an additional [poll](#) in early May to gain a better sense of how young people in and from foster care are doing.

the critical importance of providing federal and state assistance to young adults during this final developmental period in adolescence, particularly during a crisis like COVID-19. Specifically, Our most recent poll in December 2020 revealed:

- **Unemployment:** More than half of young adults from foster care are unemployed and many are not receiving unemployment: Approximately 45% report being employed (full or part time) now, down from 66 percent before the pandemic. Only half of those who applied for unemployment received it.
- **Food Insecurity:** Nearly 1 in 5 young people report they have run out of food
- **Housing Instability:** 43% were forced to move because of COVID-19. Many young people in this age group indicated that their housing was tied to their schooling, and worried where they will go if school shuts down again. **Staying in Foster Care helps stabilize housing:** 31% of those still in foster care were told they can stay in their current placement compared with 3% of those no longer in care.
- **Lack Supportive Connections:** Nearly one in 5 youth reported they are entirely on their own, lacking connections to help them endure this pandemic.
- **Higher Ed Challenges:** While education and schooling seems to have stabilized since our last poll, young people report difficulty focusing, challenges with virtual learning, and lack of access to computers or reliable WiFi. Some reported they needed to suspend their education plans in order to make money for necessities.

*“Before COVID-19, my future aspirations seemed very attainable. I had steady employment. Working three jobs, I had the means to fully take care of myself. Now, I’m currently working only one job, and struggling to meet my basic needs. The impact of COVID-19 has left me extremely vulnerable.”*

- Tiara “Tee” Mosley, former foster youth from Iowa

### **Young adults with lived experience brought critically important voices into relief conversations**

Current and former foster youth across the nation participated in a national campaign called [#UpChafee](#) highlighting needs of young people from foster care, and calling for an increase in Chafee funds to get direct relief right away. More than 3,000 young adults joined social media conversations, wrote blogs and op-eds, and shared their stories in virtual briefings for policymakers in Washington, documenting the hardships they were facing as a result of this pandemic, and highlighting their lack of connections to resources that could help them weather this storm.

In order to make the case for getting direct emergency relief to young people, FosterClub was honored to work with a dedicated group of child welfare advocates, including [Youth Villages](#), the [Juvenile Law Center](#), [Children’s Defense Fund](#), and more than 220 national, state, and youth-led organizations as part of the [#UpChafee](#) campaign.

### **Bipartisan leadership answers the calls of foster youth, provides emergency relief**

The new relief bill includes provisions put forward by a number of Congressional leaders from the House and Senate. Specifically, Representatives Danny Davis (IL-D) and Subcommittee Ranking Member

Walorski (IN-R) introduced a bill that would help young adults who have aged out of foster care without families they can turn to during this crisis. All of the provisions of the bipartisan [Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act \(H.R. 7947\)](#) were included in the new bill passed on December 21, 2020, specifically:

- \$400 million for Chafee services and direct supports to young adults in and from foster care, for education, employment, financial management, housing, emotional support and assured connections to caring adults
- Expands Chafee eligibility through age 26
- Waives education/work requirements
- Removes 30% cap on room and board
- Increases ETV from \$5,000 to \$12,000 per individual per year
- Places a moratorium on aging out (and allows for re-entry into care)
- Allows a total of \$4,000/year per recipient to cover transportation and driving costs for young people.

Additional provisions include:

- [Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Act](#) (putting the HUD [Foster Youth Independence Program](#) into law)
- Changes to FAFSA for foster youth starting in 2023 (Including an easier verification and determination process. [Learn more](#))

FosterClub wants to acknowledge that several congressional champions on both sides of the aisle who have elevated older youth voices throughout the pandemic and responded to their urgent needs through legislation, specifically:

- H. R. 6848, Pandemic Protection for Transition Aged Youth Act, introduced by Rep. Karen Bass (D-CA), Rep. Bacon (R-NE), Rep. Langevin (D-RI), Mrs. Lawrence (D-MI), and Mr. Mitchell (R-MI).
- H.R.6766 – A bill to temporarily modify the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and for other purposes, introduced by Rep. Jim Langevin (D-RI)
- H.R. 6800, The Heroes Act, introduced by Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA)
- The Child Welfare Emergency Assistance Act, introduced by Senators Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Kamala D. Harris (D-CA), Bob Casey (D-PA) and Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV). See here for a bill summary.
- The American Workers, Families, and Employers Assistance Act (S. 4318) by Senator Chuck Grassley (R-IA) as part of the Health; Economic Assistance; Liability protection; and Schools the “HEALS ACT on July 27, 2020

To review the COVID Relief package which includes the Supporting Foster Youth & Families Act, you can use the links below:

[Full Text](#) (These provisions are under Division X)

[Section Summary](#)

[Advocates Summary](#)

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### Have Questions?

Contact FosterClub at [policy@fosterclub.com](mailto:policy@fosterclub.com) or call us at 503-717-1552.