



As New COVID Variants Spread, Proposed Chafee Extension Bill Casts Lifeline to Foster Youth with Additional \$400 Million in Funds

*Increased Flexibility in Spending for States Supports Older Youth
Transitioning out of Foster Care during Pandemic*

SEPTEMBER 8, 2021 - WASHINGTON, DC - When the Consolidated Appropriations Act was signed into law in late 2020, young people in and from foster care rejoiced. Its provisions related to foster care and Chafee programs for older youth provided millions in emergency aid to young people during a pandemic of epic proportions.

Just as we're nearing the expiration of some of these critical supports (on September 30, 2021), Congressional Champions and Co-Chairs of the Congressional Caucus on Foster Youth: Representative Karen Bass (CA-37), Representative Don Bacon (NE-02), Representative Jim Langevin (RI-02), Representative Brenda Lawrence (MI-14), and Representative Markwayne Mullin (OK-02) introduced a bipartisan bill to extend and expand pandemic support for foster youth (H.R. 5167). This new bill provides an additional \$400 million in funds and extends all of the flexibilities that allow more youth to receive emergency resources. It also ensures that those resources aren't counted against other federal benefits.

The initial \$400 million allocated last year provided life saving support to young people across the nation. When polled by FosterClub, many Independent Living Provider (ILP) coordinators confirmed how the funding provided necessities to young people who had no safe haven. According to an ILP coordinator in Illinois, "In the last two months we have helped many youth with rent and utilities, but more importantly food, household items and clothing."

Yet, some states haven't been able to reach all young people and many are still struggling. With this proposed extension, young adults exiting out of the foster care system largely alone and with little to no resources could continue receiving critical financial resources they need to survive.

COVID-19 has severely affected young people transitioning out of foster care, causing housing and employment loss, food insecurity, health care challenges and all the implications of extreme isolation. In the midst of the pandemic, FosterClub polled nearly 500 young people from 43 states with lived experience in foster care about the challenges they were facing. The results were alarming. To further compound the issues, many of these young adults lack the kinds of significant relationships that others can rely on for financial or emotional support.

“With unclear complications arising around the emergence of the Delta and other variants, young people coming out of foster care are still facing these same challenges today. Emergency funding provided by this proposed pandemic extension bill can literally mean the difference between life and death,” said Celeste Bodner, Executive Director of FosterClub. “Our poll results revealed the critical need for federal and state assistance during this transitional period, especially during a global crisis such as COVID-19.”

Helping to empower young people with lived experience in foster care is the core mission of FosterClub. These youth often become advocates for other young people going through the foster care system. Collectively, young people’s voices led to the nationwide availability of relief through the Consolidated Appropriations Act. Their coordinated #UPChafee campaign featured the voices of current and former foster youth and raised awareness around the challenges the pandemic brought. In addition to virtual briefings before policymakers in Washington, DC, more than 3,000 dedicated young adults electrified social media and other online platforms with real-world stories about the hardships they faced. The #UPChafee campaign was also supported by more than 220 national, state and youth-led organizations. Today, young people’s voices continue to be heard, as they ask Congress to #ReUpChafee.

“An unexpected yet welcome outcome of this pandemic has been the conversations around how child welfare systems can think differently and more effectively about serving older youth,” added Bodner. “The proposed pandemic extended relief bill continues those efforts to build upon programs that have already done lots of good work for young people.”

The original bill was designed to help young adults who have aged out of foster care without families, and provided funds for education, employment, housing and support. It also extended eligibility through age 26, waived education/work requirements, removed the 30% cap on room and board, increased ETV to \$12,000/year per individual, placed a moratorium on aging out and allowed \$4,000/year per individual to cover transportation and driving costs.

These kinds of services are essential for young people between the ages of 18 and 26 who, when polled, report significantly higher levels of unemployment, food and housing instability, lack of supportive care and higher education challenges. If this bill is passed, many types of services and financial support can continue to be provided at this crucial time, helping to enable our young people so they can thrive.

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About FosterClub:

FosterClub's mission is to lead the efforts of young people in and from foster care to become connected, educated, inspired and represented so they can realize their personal potential and contribute to a better life for their peers. More than 500 young leaders have been served by FosterClub, who helped raise \$1.2 million to support and develop youth in foster care. More than 3000 foster parents have been educated by

foster youth-informed curriculum. Today, FosterClub maintains connections among more than 40,000 current and former foster youth and supporters. Additional information is available at fosterclub.com.