



April 6, 2021



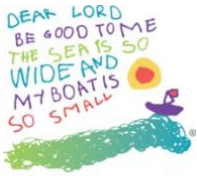
Kim Johnson, Director
California Department of Social Services
744 P Street
Sacramento, CA 95814



Dear Director Johnson,



We appreciate the opportunity to support your Department's efforts to support our older youth and maximize available resources provided in recent federal actions. This letter serves as a follow up to our previous set of recommendations dated February 2, 2021 regarding the funding made available through the Consolidated Appropriations Act for the Chafee Independent Living Program. It remains our top priority that these funds be disbursed as quickly as possible and that immediate direct payments to youth be prioritized. We met with you to discuss these priorities on March 4, and the Children's Bureau issued a new program instruction, ACYF-CB-PI-21-04, on March 9. Now that program instructions have been made available and the exact amounts are known, we have further refined our recommendations. We recommend that funds be disbursed as follows:



Chafee	
Payments to NMDs/youth receiving continued assistance beyond 21	\$11,100,000
Payments to former foster youth	\$25,200,000
Funds to support aging out transition	\$ 2,500,000
Administration and outreach	\$ 2,500,000
ETV	
Current waiting list	\$1,800,000
2021/2022 additional grants	\$1,400,000
Grants beyond \$5000 to current recipients	\$2,800,000

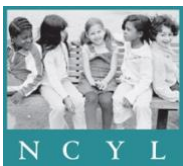


Children Now

CHAFEE FUNDS



Of the \$41,280,026 available, we recommend that the bulk of the funding be used to issue direct payments to current nonminor dependents (NMDs), youth receiving continued assistance beyond 21 and eligible former foster youth. This should include payments to NMDs without a current placement. As noted in our previous letter, we recommend that prepaid cards be used for fund disbursement, similar to how funds were disbursed in 2020 to help families stay together. We further recommend that no means test or application be required and that the responsibility for verifying eligibility for funding should be on the agency distributing the funds rather than on the youth.



We recommend that roughly \$36,310,000 should be reserved for direct payments. This would allow for payments of \$1,100 to NMDs and youth receiving continued assistance beyond 21 and \$1,750 to youth who have exited foster care.



According to data from the California Child Welfare Indicators Project there were 9370 NMDs or youth receiving continued assistance beyond 21 as of October 1, 2020. An estimated 1400 additional youth turned 18 in the months since October 1, 2020 for a total of 10,770.

Extrapolating from available data regarding youth exits from foster care, there are an estimated 72,000 youth who exited foster care after the age of 14 and are currently between the ages of 18-26. Given that many of these former foster youth will likely not be reachable, we anticipate that roughly 20% of the total eligible youth will request funding, for a total of 14,400 youth.

Payments of \$1,100 to 10,770 NMDs = \$11,110,000

Payments of \$1,750 to 14,400 former foster youth (FFY) = \$25,200,000

If fewer youth than budgeted for request funds, a second round of funding could be disbursed to all those who received funds during the first round.

Up to \$2.5 million should be reserved to support the transition of youth aging out of foster care when existing moratoriums expire.

An estimated 1700 youth will age out of foster care on December 31, 2021 when the current moratorium on exits due to age is expected to expire.

These funds should be reserved for use by counties to support the transition of these youth into transitional or permanent housing. These funds could be used to pay moving costs, rent and utility deposits and housing costs as needed to avoid homelessness while youth await placement in THP-Plus or other housing programs. This would provide a flexible source of funding that counties can use to leverage the Housing Navigation Program and Transitional Housing Program funds that they will be receiving from HCD in the coming months.

Up to \$2.5 million should be made available for outreach activities and administrative costs.

As noted above, we recommend that all funding to both NMDs and FFY be disbursed through pre-paid cards directly to youth. This would include payments to NMDs without a current placement and to NMDs where regular foster care payments go directly to a provider or resource family.

For current NMDs, we recommend that county agencies be instructed to provide a list of individuals with contact information to the pre-paid card distributor who would then issue prepaid cards. For former foster youth, we recommend utilizing a third-party vendor to receive requests from youth through both an online form and by phone. Upon receipt of a request, the vendor would verify eligibility through CWS/CMS and submit a request to the pre-paid card distributor for issuance of a card.

Funds should also be used to ensure that there is a robust outreach strategy. State and local marketing plans should be developed in collaboration with current and former foster youth, the Office of the Foster Care Ombudsperson, local community-based organizations, advocacy organizations, college campus programs, Medi-Cal providers and other relevant partners.

These costs could include:

- Funding for counties to compile and transmit contact information for current NMDs to the pre-paid card distributor.
- Funding for Independent Living Programs to conduct outreach to former foster youth.

- Funding for additional outreach to former foster youth, which could include funding for the Ombudsperson’s office, California Youth Connection, Think of Us and other relevant providers.
- Funding for an entity to verify eligibility, confirm mailing address and request pre-paid cards from distributor for former foster youth who request funding.
- Funding for the pre-paid card distributor’s administrative costs.
- Funding for outreach to youth who exited foster care between January 1 and April 20, 2020 to support re-entry into foster care.

CHAFEE ETV FUNDS

The \$6,000,004 available specifically for ETV should first be used to eliminate the current waiting list. Remaining ETV funds should be transmitted to the California Student Aid Commission to ensure that all students who receive ETV funding in 2020/2021 can be renewed for the 2021/2022 academic year, while also allowing some newly enrolled students to receive funding.

\$1.8 million to fund students currently on the Chafee ETV waiting list. As of February 24, 2021, there were 1,031 students waiting to be awarded for the Chafee grant, however, many may no longer be enrolled. This estimate is based on an assumption that 50% are currently enrolled and that the average award amount will be \$3500.

\$1.4 million to enable all students who receive an award during the 2020/2021 school year to receive funding in 2021/2022. This is based on an assumption that of the additional students awarded for 2021/2022, 80% return the following year.

The remaining \$2.8 million should be used to expand award amounts for the 2021/2022 academic year beyond \$5,000 for youth with the greatest level of need. Priority should be given based on CSAC’s current allocation prioritization system, which prioritizes students with dependents, students in their final year of ETV eligibility and students with the greatest unmet financial need. Students would receive an additional \$1500 payment in priority order until all funds are spent. As the Relief Act allows ETV payments to be increased to \$12,000 per youth, CDSS should also explore whether other elements of stimulus funding could be used to supplement this allocation.

We are committed to working with the department to support this and related efforts, including assisting with outreach so that more eligible young people are aware of and able to access not only these funds but also other resources through the Golden State Stimulus and CDSS’s other safety net programs, which have largely been inaccessible to current and former foster youth during the pandemic. If you have any questions regarding these recommendations or would like to discuss this future, please contact Debbie Raucher at debbie@jbay.org.

Respectfully,

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Alliance for Children’s Rights

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