

Legislation Text

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Authorizing the Committees on Public Health and Human Services and on Children and Youth to hold joint hearings examining current and best practices to ensure youth have a successful transition from foster care to thriving adulthood.

WHEREAS, Foster youth are moving out of foster homes and into homelessness at an alarming frequency. Each year, approximately 20,000 youth in the United States leave foster care without permanent family connections. About 28% of them will experience homelessness, and nearly 40% will experience homelessness and/or housing instability. According to the Pew Research Center, 52% of American youth between 18 and 29 lived with at least one parent as of July 2020 (up from 47% in February). Youth without stable family connections-most youth in the foster care system-do not have the liberty of having stable housing after 18; and

WHEREAS, The COVID-19 pandemic has most negatively impacted young adults aging out of the foster care system. According to a survey published by the Field Center in April, about 25% of foster youth in America had to relocate due to the pandemic, nearly half lost their jobs or had their hours greatly decreased, over half reported that they were food insecure, and over half revealed that they were struggling with depression and anxiety; and

WHEREAS, In Pennsylvania, thousands of youth are leaving the State's care without adequate support. A third (8,639) of the State's foster care population are between ages 14 and 21, generally referred to as "transition age youth". Almost half (49%) of Pennsylvania's transition age youth "age out" of the foster care system without being reunified or connected to a permanent family. By age 21, 37% of them will experience homelessness or unstable housing, and only 44% will have full-time or part-time employment; and

WHEREAS, According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 25% of transition age youth have been in two or more placements while in care and 42% have been in three or more placements. In Pennsylvania, 47% of transition age youth are in group homes or institutions rather than family-based settings. Many of these youth will "age out" without any strong interpersonal connections to a figure who can help guide them into adulthood, leaving transition age youth without practical, developmental, professional, and emotional support. According to Child Trends, adolescence is a particularly crucial time for brain development, especially learning the necessary decision-making and coping skills to become a healthy adult. Without parents or supportive adults present, this transition to adulthood will be even more turbulent and difficult; and

WHEREAS, In Philadelphia, there are over 5,000 children and youth in foster care at any given time. According to The Philadelphia Public School Notebook, in 2016, there were 8,020 children in foster care. Many will move between placements frequently, and with each school change, a child's likelihood of graduating drops by 10%. The School District of Philadelphia has no say in a child's placement, which is instead decided by the Philadelphia Department of Human Services and the courts. There is also no database in which judges can pull information on the effectiveness of various schools for foster children unlike other states and counties, putting these children's educations in jeopardy; and

WHEREAS, Youth in foster care consistently underperform in school compared to their general population

peers and are far less likely to complete high school or college. Nationwide, only about half of youth raised in foster care end up finishing high school, less than 6% make it to college, and less than 3% graduate from a 4-year college. Over 40% of school-aged children in foster care have educational difficulties. High school dropout rates are also three times higher for foster youth than other low-income children; and

WHEREAS, According to the Juvenile Law Center, when youth “age out” of foster care unprepared, they face many challenges such as lower high school and college graduation rates, greater dependence on public benefits, and increased risk for incarceration and teen pregnancy. Extended foster care can help older youth thrive as adults and achieve better outcomes by allowing them to be better prepared through the development of relationships, skills, and resources; and giving children and youth agencies more time to connect youth with family if permanency has not been achieved; and

WHEREAS, Foster youth often face a history of complex trauma, frequently changing situations and transitions, broken family relationships, inconsistent and inadequate access to mental health services, and the over-prescription of psychotropic medications. In Philadelphia, 25-40% of children and youth in foster care report abuse during care. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, up to 80% of children in foster care have significant mental health issues and as a result are prescribed psychotropic medications at a much higher rate than non-foster youth, costing the state, through fee-for-service programs such as Medicaid, millions of dollars a year. The American Academy of Pediatrics’ Healthy Foster Care American Initiative, identifies mental and behavioral health as the “greatest unmet health need for children and teens in foster care”; and

WHEREAS, Foster youth are an often forgotten about, yet incredibly vulnerable population. Our government has made a commitment to care for these youth, so it is both imperative and long overdue that the City establish a continuum of care supported by the government and through our communities so that our current and former foster youth will successfully transition to a healthy, stable, and thriving adulthood; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That Council does hereby authorize the Committees on Public Health and Human Services and on Children and Youth to hold joint hearings examining current and best practices to ensure youth have a successful transition from foster care to thriving adulthood.