WELL-BEING IN ACTION:

Expanding Equitable Access to Comprehensive Supports for Foster Youth

JULY 2022 | EDITION 15

CONGRESSIONAL COALITION ON ADOPTION INSTITUTE
FOSTER YOUTH INTERNSHIP PROGRAM®

The Foster Youth Internship Program® is a signature program of the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute on Capitol Hill for the past 20 years.
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The odds are stacked against youth who spend time in the foster care system. There are significant opportunity gaps that perpetuate broader inequalities in our society. In the United States, over 407,000 children and youth are living without permanent families in the foster care system. 20 years ago, CCAI developed the Foster Youth Internship® (FYI) Program in response to the poor outcomes youth experience in the U.S. foster care system. The FYI program serves as a platform to uplift the voices of current and former foster youth in federal policy to engage and educate Members of Congress on the issues of foster care and adoption and empower Foster Youth Interns to be advocates.

As we celebrate this milestone year of the FYI Program, CCAI is honored to introduce seven leaders, the authors of this report, to Congress and the Administration. The class of 2022 Foster Youth Interns has spent their summer researching and writing federal policy recommendations on important topics related to foster care reform including strengthening mental and physical health services; mitigating multi-system involvement between the juvenile justice and foster care systems; addressing disparities and increasing critical, timely supports for transition-aged youth including education, housing, well-being, and employment; and ensuring safety and stability for vulnerable children and families.

April, Stormy, Christina, Nijeria, Anna, Lina, and Ryan: thank you for paving the way toward a better future in removing barriers, expanding equitable access, improving outcomes, and ensuring that children, youth, and families who encounter the U.S. child welfare system do not face the same obstacles that you experienced.

We have sincere gratitude for the leadership from our Board of Directors and support from faithful partners. We give special thanks to: American Council of Life Insurers, Apollo Global Management, Arnold & Porter, Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck, Bruce and Linda Graham and BEB, Carlson Family Foundation, Comcast NBCUniversal, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, and Retail Orphan Initiative.

We are delighted to introduce the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute’s 2022 Foster Youth Internship Program® federal policy report, Well-being in Action: Expanding Equitable Access to Comprehensive Supports for Foster Youth. We hope you are inspired by the ideas and solutions for change.

Kate McLean
Executive Director
ABOUT CCAI

MISSION
The Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute is dedicated to raising awareness about the millions of children around the world in need of permanent, safe, and nurturing families and to eliminating the barriers that hinder these children from realizing their basic right to a family.

VISION
Our vision is a world in which every child knows the love and support of a family.

HISTORY
CCAI was founded in 2001 by advocates of children in the U.S. and around the world in need of safe and nurturing families. In founding CCAI, these advocates sought to match the commitment of Members of Congress’ Adoption Caucus, the Congressional Coalition on Adoption (CCA), with the information and resources needed to make the dream of a family a reality for every child through the creation of CCAI. As a convener, CCAI brings together voices of experience and expertise to the U.S. Congress. CCAI believes every child deserves a family and every family deserves a caring community.

Although the Adoption Caucus (CCA) and CCAI are distinct entities, they are closely linked in partnership. Over 160 Members of the 117th Congress have joined and are actively engaged in supporting legislation and policy that improves the lives of children and families in the United States and around the world. Both the CCA and CCAI are deeply committed to bipartisanship, strengthening families, and permanency.

CCAI is unique in that each of our programs brings together policymakers and individuals with direct foster care or adoption experience. When Members of Congress hear direct experiences of those affected by child welfare systems, they become engaged in this issue and work to bring about legislative improvements to ensure each child’s right to a family is realized.
ABOUT THE FYI PROGRAM

CCAI's Foster Youth Internship (FYI) Program® is a congressional internship for young adults who have experienced the foster care system to raise awareness to federal policymakers about permanency, foster care, child welfare, financing, abuse, and neglect. Since 2003, the FYI Program provided the Foster Youth Interns (FYIs) the opportunity to intern in a congressional office on Capitol Hill — both exposing the FYIs to the policymaking process as well as raising awareness to federal policymakers about the needs and unique perspectives of those who have spent time in foster care.

For the past 15 years, since 2008, the FYI Program has offered the Foster Youth Interns the opportunity to use their newfound understanding of Capitol Hill and federal policy to research and write a policy report. The interns focus on topics they are personally passionate about, generally linked to their own experience in foster care, and make policy recommendations to improve the U.S. child welfare system for children who are currently in foster care. This report and its recommendations are disseminated across the country and presented by the interns in briefings to the U.S. Congress, White House Domestic Policy Council, and beginning in 2019, at two additional briefings to industry leaders in the private sector and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Many of these policy recommendations have been passed into law.

After their time on Capitol Hill, CCAI’s Foster Youth Interns have gone on to work in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, White House, Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Veteran’s Affairs, community banks, law firms, counseling groups, national child welfare organizations, and state child welfare agencies. Many FYIs also pursue degrees of higher education after obtaining undergraduate degrees. Moreover, the FYIs leave Washington, D.C. with experience and skills that continue to bolster their careers and provide a foundation for them to become lifelong advocates for youth in foster care.

Note: The opinions, findings, and conclusions presented in the Foster Youth Internship Program® Policy Report are the authors’ own and do not necessarily reflect the view of CCAI including leadership, donors, and partners.
2022 Foster Youth Intern Policy Reports:

WELL-BEING IN ACTION
Expanding Equitable Access to Comprehensive Supports for Foster Youth
ENHANCING COMPREHENSIVE MEDICAL SUPPORTS FOR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

April Barcus

RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY

Given the high correlation between child welfare system involvement and complex health and mental health challenges, all children in foster care should have an enhanced medical support system during and after their time in care. This should include: (1) continuous access to high-quality healthcare for all foster youth, (2) a foster youth health care navigator for every current and former foster youth, and (3) the development and implementation of a training program, mandated for all providers and caregivers, to help ensure they best address and support the unique and complex healthcare needs of youth with foster care system experience.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Foster youth are at higher risk of suffering from chronic illness or disabilities in their lifetime, but the foster care system does not adequately address this higher risk. Given the high correlation between child welfare system involvement and complex health and mental health challenges, all children in foster care should have an enhanced medical support system during and after their time in care.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

I suffer from multiple chronic illnesses that went undiagnosed for ten years while I was in foster care despite being symptomatic. I was frequently accused of faking or exaggerating my symptoms, which delayed receiving an official diagnosis and access to the treatment I needed. Among other ailments, I suffered from frequent, severe migraines, yet during one of my congregate care placements, the staff would often bang keys on the door yelling at me to wake up, and then barge into my room, turn on the lights, and take my blankets away. I would be forced to go about my day despite the debilitating pain. It was a traumatic experience to have those who were supposed to care for me not believe me and ultimately made it harder for me to accept my disabilities later in life.
PERSONAL REFLECTION (CONTINUED)

As a young adult I continue to face intense challenges navigating the medical system – and usually without help. I do my own research, advocate for referrals and testing, and keep track of my medical records. During my six years in care I experienced thirty-three placements, exacerbating my difficulties in managing my medical care. Additionally, the complex nature of my conditions necessitates access to specialty providers and extensive diagnostic testing. While in care I experienced difficulty obtaining referrals to specialists, long-wait times and had to restart this cycle whenever I was placed in a new home. Even after receiving my diagnoses, I struggled to obtain treatment and care for my conditions, which negatively affected my health and academic performance.

THE PROBLEM & CURRENT LAW

Many foster youth experience trauma, making them more likely to have Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), traumatic events that occur before a child reaches the age of 18. By definition, children in the child welfare system have suffered at least one ACE and recent studies have documented that compared with the general population, youth involved in the child welfare system are far more likely to experience at least four ACEs (42 percent vs. 12.5 percent) (Clarkson Freeman, 2014). There is a significant body of research connecting high ACE scores with poor health outcomes: “Twenty years of medical research has shown that child adversity literally gets under our skin, changing people in ways that can endure in their bodies for decades. It can alter the way DNA is read and how cells replicate, and it can dramatically increase the risk for heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes - even Alzheimer’s” (Burke, 2019). Despite this profound correlation between high ACE scores and health problems, the delivery of healthcare services for youth in foster care, particularly with respect to care from specialists, often does not account for the experience of instability, putting the onus on the young person in care to do things like manage medical records and find new doctors.

Medicaid is a health insurance program jointly funded by the federal and state governments which provides health coverage to certain eligible populations, including the majority of children and youth involved in the child welfare system. The Affordable Care Act (ACA) required states to expand Medicaid coverage for young adults under age 26 if they were in foster care on or after their 18th birthday and enrolled in the state’s Medicaid program and some states have extended this benefit to youth aged out of care in other states as well (“Medicaid,” n.d.).
All children and youth under age 21 enrolled in Medicaid are entitled to Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) services. This means that “all states are required to provide comprehensive services and furnish all coverable, appropriate and medically necessary services needed to correct and ameliorate health conditions, even if such services are not included in the Medicaid state plan.” The EPSDT benefit is particularly important for foster care children and youth because of their acute medical and behavioral health needs.

While Medicaid pays for the majority of healthcare costs incurred by foster youth, it does not support or facilitate a continuous, coordinated, patient-centered experience within the health care system, particularly one that can appropriately address the unique experiences of foster youth who are more likely to experience chronic conditions that require access to specialty care and who may experience placement changes that impact their access to care or health records (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2022). The 2008 Fostering Connections to Adoption and Success Act took some steps to help achieve this, requiring states “to develop, in coordination and collaboration with the state Medicaid agency and in consultation with pediatricians and other experts, a plan for the ongoing oversight and coordination of health care services for any child in foster care” (North American Council on Adoptable Children, 2013). However, in practice, care, coordination, and maintenance of medical records continues to fall short, particularly for young people in care like myself, suffering with disabilities and chronic conditions (North American Council on Adoptable Children, 2013).
**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Given the high correlation between child welfare system involvement and complex health and mental health challenges, all children in foster care should have an enhanced medical support system during and after their time in care. This should include:

- **The continuous access to high-quality healthcare for all foster youth by requiring:**
  - The creation of a central, electronic access point for medical records that is accessible by youth, social workers and other relevant members of their team to ensure medical records are always accessible and to ensure that a complete medical history is maintained. Design and implementation must have coordination and oversight at the federal level to ensure portability across state lines and accessibility by state child welfare agencies and state Medicaid agencies.
  - Communication between providers and age-appropriate involvement of the youth when provider changes occur.
  - A “Doctor of Origin” policy, wherein if the youth changes placements within a reasonable distance, or through telehealth when necessary (including across state lines and after aging out), the youth can remain with the current provider and Medicaid will continue to reimburse for care and services provided.

- **A foster youth healthcare navigator for every current and former foster youth.** This dedicated health care navigator would support and assist youth as they navigate the healthcare system and serve as their advocate.

- **The development and implementation of a training program, mandated for all providers and caregivers, to help ensure they best address and support the unique and complex healthcare needs of youth with foster care system experience.** The Children's Bureau, in collaboration with The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), would develop a training module of best practices to better support foster youth with disabilities and chronic illness. At a minimum, the training would include education on ACE scores and child welfare involvement, invisible versus visible disabilities, accessibility and inclusion of youth with disabilities, how to spot warning signs and symptoms, and models for care coordination consistent with the implementation of the enhanced medical support system. Foster youth with disabilities and chronic illnesses should be engaged in the development and implementation of the training curriculum and legislation codifying this training would ensure that states implement this training consistently throughout the country.
MITIGATING CROSS SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT TO INCREASE POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

Stormy Lukasavage

RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY

To help mitigate cross system involvement between the juvenile justice (JJ) and foster care systems, I recommend that Congress: (1) request a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report focused on the overlaps between child welfare and juvenile justice, including the prevalence, causes, as well as recommendations for the federal government to reduce JJ system involvement among youth in foster care; (2) ensure that youth in foster care have adequate legal representation in court to fully represent the best interest in their cases, and help them understand and protect their rights; and (3) create a new formula grant program aimed at piloting best practices for preventing dual-system involvement, which should include both a strong youth voice component and an evaluation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Young people who have experienced foster care are at a higher risk of juvenile justice involvement than their peers, due to a variety of factors. Some studies show that up to 70 percent of youth in the juvenile justice system have spent time in foster care ("Striking Back," 2018). I recommend that Congress and the federal government do more to learn and understand the intersectional nature of youth who crossover from the foster care system into the juvenile justice system and take the necessary steps to prevent this from happening.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

One of the most impactful moments of my life occurred after I aged out of foster care. I was working in a correctional facility as an intern teaching a risk analysis class when one of my friends from a foster care group home showed up. That group home was a hotbed for juvenile delinquency due to easy accessibility to drugs, violence among peers, poor community support, and other factors, but I never expected to see him at the correctional facility. Out of curiosity, I asked how many of the adult inmates I was working with had spent time in foster care, and a sea of hands flung up.
PERSONAL REFLECTION (CONTINUED)

That was the day I realized how blurry the lines can be between foster care and the correctional system. Although I never entered the juvenile justice system, I can see how easily my troubled past might have turned into a lifetime of criminal offenses.

Being in foster care means that you are constantly under a microscope and punished for normal adolescent behavior. In group homes, we were punished by losing access to quarters necessary to do our laundry and for public transportation forcing us to find other ways to accomplish basic tasks that placed us in more trouble. Shop-lifting was a cultural norm in our facility to acquire food and cleaning supplies. That pipeline from group housing to correctional housing was a natural transition, and it could have easily swallowed me too.

THE PROBLEM & CURRENT LAW

Data on the intersection between child welfare and juvenile justice is limited, but the connections between the two systems are well-established. One study explored the histories of youth in correctional facilities in New York, NY, Cuyahoga County, OH, and Cook County, IL, and found that percentages of youth who had child welfare experience were 70.3 percent, 68.5 percent, and 44.8 percent, respectively (Kelley & Haskins, 2021). Another study in Wisconsin found that nearly half of the population in Wisconsin’s State Penitentiary had experienced foster care (Font et al., 2021). It has also been determined that youth of color in foster care experience the highest rates of juvenile justice system involvement (Miller & Pilnik, 2021). Males are also more likely to cross over from foster care into juvenile justice than females (Miller & Pilnik, 2021).

INCIDENT RATES FOR DUAL SYSTEM YOUTH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jurisdiction</th>
<th>Number of Youth in Cohort Study</th>
<th>Prevalence of Dual System Youth Among First Juvenile Justice Petition Cohort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New York, New York</td>
<td>1,272</td>
<td>70.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuyahoga County, Ohio</td>
<td>11,441</td>
<td>68.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook County, Illinois</td>
<td>14,170</td>
<td>44.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There are a number of reasons for the overlap between the juvenile justice and foster care systems including mental health. Mental health issues are present in 70 to 75 percent of juvenile justice-involved youth, with drugs also being rampant (Miller & Pilnik, 2021). Further, over 90 percent of juvenile justice-involved youth had exposure to trauma, with over 80 percent in foster care having that exposure. In addition, group care placements for foster youth are overly punitive, too often not trauma-informed, and do not tolerate normal adolescent behavior. According to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), in 2020, there were 15,975 children in foster care placed in group homes and 22,824 placed in another institutional setting – representing 10 percent of total placements in foster care (HHS, 2022b).

However, these numbers vary a lot from state to state depending on experience of foster care. A report by the Juvenile Law Center finds that youth who experience more time in foster care are more likely to experience the criminal justice system, suggesting that the length of time spent in foster care and the number of placements in foster care matters (Yamat, 2020). Despite these significant overlaps, little attention has been paid to dual-system involvement at the policy level. Recently, the federal government took an important step by requiring states to collect data on children and youth in foster care who are also juvenile justice system-involved through AFCARS (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2022b). This data will help to guide future policy reform efforts.

Some evidence-based programs show promise in preventing youth in foster care from entering the juvenile justice system. For example, Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care, which involves placing youth in a foster home where treatment is prioritized, has been shown to reduce rates of incarceration. This speaks to the need for supportive, treatment-focused foster care placements, as opposed to placements where behavior is punished (Leve & Chamberlain, 2005).

Mental health issues are present in 70 to 75 percent of juvenile justice-involved youth.
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To help mitigate cross system involvement between the juvenile justice and foster care systems, Congress should:

- **Request a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report focused on the overlaps between child welfare and juvenile justice**, including the prevalence, causes, as well as recommendations for the federal government to reduce juvenile justice system involvement among youth in foster care.

- **Ensure that youth in foster care have adequate legal representation in court** to fully represent the best interest in their cases, and help them understand and protect their rights.

- **Create a new formula grant program aimed at piloting best practices for preventing dual-system involvement** which should include both a strong youth voice component and an evaluation.

Scrutinizing these practices under a microscope for deliberation will lead to a future with lower rates of recidivism by placing the needs of the youth first. As a society, we need to stop looking at those incarcerated as damaged goods and rather as people who didn’t get a fair shake.
RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY

To further promote higher education success among youth who have experienced foster care, I recommend that Congress transform the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee) and Education and Training Voucher (ETV) programs to serve more young people and ensure they can meet their educational goals. Congress should (1) allow the Chafee and ETV to be used towards tuition, fees, and educational assistance; (2) allow Chafee dollars to support a monthly housing allowance with a stability clause that will provide up to four months of housing allowance every year regardless of a young person’s college enrollment status; and (3) allow states to use their Chafee and ETV dollars flexibly and with the input of young people with experience in foster care.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Although we expect young people with diverse backgrounds to complete post-secondary education in order to succeed in adulthood, students with foster care experience face significant financial barriers. As a result, just four percent of young people from foster care complete college, and only one percent complete graduate school (Courtney et al., 2011). To further promote success in higher education among youth who have experienced foster care, I recommend that Congress transform the Chafee and Education and Training Voucher (ETV) programs to serve more young people and ensure they can meet their educational goals.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

I am a first-generation college graduate who has defied many odds and low expectations. I completed my undergraduate degree in 2018 and most recently received a Master of Social Work (MSW) from the University of Michigan where I graduated with honors and was the keynote speaker for my graduating class. Despite these credentials, the road here was not easy.
PERSONAL REFLECTION (CONTINUED)

I entered foster care at birth through kinship, and my experience in foster care created challenges at every step of my educational journey. I was placed in special education throughout grade school, was not allowed to take classes to meet college requirements, and my college counselor refused to apply for tuition assistance for me due to her assumptions about what I was and was not capable of. When I graduated high school, I was ineligible for support from the Chafee program and the Educational and Training Vouchers (ETVs), placing me far behind my peers in terms of financial assistance and support. As a first-generation college student, I relied on loans, scholarships, and multiple jobs to make ends meet.

Working multiple jobs under the stress of my accumulating debt, I went from being a straight-A student to failing almost all of my classes and jeopardizing my eligibility for financial aid. At this point, I almost dropped out of college. Had it not been for the Educational Opportunity Program, which helped connect me to both financial and mental health support, all of my accomplishments, and even this report, may have never happened. Since that time, I have served as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) and an Educational Opportunity Program College mentor. I have witnessed students from foster care struggle with the similar challenges I have faced and subsequently drop out of college. Completing post-secondary education, while often seen as necessary for success, is enormously more complicated for students with foster care experience who lack emotional and financial support.

THE PROBLEM & CURRENT LAW

Currently, less than three percent of students with lived experience in foster care receive a bachelor’s degree in contrast to 24 percent of young adults in the general population (Sarubbi et al., 2016). A study by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago revealed that, although more than 80 percent of emerging adults in foster care aspire to pursue post-secondary education, just 55 percent were enrolled in one semester or quarter almost four years later (Walsh, 2021). Students with lived experience in foster care are half as likely to graduate with a bachelor’s degree within six years compared to dependent students who have not been in foster care (Kantrowitz, 2022).

Congress has taken action to support students with foster care experience through the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee) program, Education and Training Vouchers (ETV), Pell grants, and the Educational Opportunity Program (which are also available to low-income students).
THE PROBLEM & CURRENT LAW (CONTINUED)

These policies provide critical support to many students who experience foster care. Still, this support is limited; age restrictions differ state by state, which limits many students from qualifying for these funds or accessing them beyond their undergraduate studies. For example, ETV is only available for five years for students who entered care at 14 years old and have not reached the age of 26, and Chafee ends at 21 or 23 for states with extended foster care (Bustillos et al., 2022). Chafee and ETV leave students experience in the foster care system with serious financial gaps.

In researching effective approaches for supporting people in their educational goals, federal programs for veterans emerged as a key model for what support could look like for former foster youth. Programs such as the post-9/11 GI Bill for individuals who served in the military have improved postsecondary outcomes for veterans. The post-9/11 GI Bill provides funding for tuition and fees directly to the school, and students with funding for books, and a monthly housing allowance (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2020). I believe students from foster care should be given similar opportunities to that of veterans. Support should not be limited by age, funding, or complicated metrics.

States have also developed financial assistance programs for foster youth. Currently, about 37 states provide tuition waivers or scholarships for students with experience in foster care (Bustillos, et al., 2022). Still, eligibility, funding, and participating colleges are different from state to state. Texas has the highest form of tuition assistance available, and its program has increased postsecondary completion rates for students with foster care experience by 3.5 times.
To further promote higher education success among youth who have experienced foster care, I recommend that Congress transform the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee) and Education and Training Voucher (ETV) programs to serve more young people and ensure they can meet their educational goals:

- **Allow Chafee and ETV to be used towards tuition, fees, and educational assistance**, and reform the eligibility requirements to include young people who have spent at least one year in foster care or or entered care at 14 years old to allow for more flexibility.

- **Allow Chafee dollars to support a monthly housing allowance with a stability clause that will provide up to four months of housing allowance every year** regardless of a young person’s college enrollment status or Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) to account for summer or emergencies and allow for flexibility for off-campus housing that is based on the Fair Market Rents (FMRs).

- **Allow states to use their Chafee and ETV dollars flexibly and with the input of young people with experience in foster care**, such as for retroactive loan forgiveness for students.
ACCESSING FUNDS IN FOSTER CARE TODAY FOR TRANSITION-AGED YOUTH

Nijeria Peterson

RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY

To ensure more young people in foster care have access to the important resources that are already available to them, I recommend that Congress: (1) amend the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee) and Education and Training Voucher (ETV) programs to allow youth in all states to receive benefits to which they are entitled up to one year after aging out; (2) encourage states to use all of their Chafee funding each fiscal year; (3) request the Government Accountability Office (GAO) explore how eligibility requirements and application processes across different federal benefit programs; and (4) require states prepare a comprehensive list of eligible resources for transition-aged youth.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Foster youth who are aging out of care rely heavily on federal and state programs and services that support their housing, employment, education, and food. However, these services do not always reach young people who are eligible for them. Although young people in foster care need much more support, at minimum they should have access to the benefits for which they are eligible. I call on Congress to take targeted actions to reduce the barriers associated with accessing key supports that help youth be successful in adulthood.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

I was placed into foster care just before I entered college at the age of 17. Because of this, I had very little financial assistance for tuition, books, food, and other basic needs. Fortunately, I learned of several resources that were available to me as a foster youth through the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee program) and other federal programs. These resources included a car voucher and insurance reimbursement, housing assistance, and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, also known as food stamps.
What I quickly learned, however, was that many of these programs were not accessible because of tedious eligibility rules, excessive documentation requirements, and bureaucratic delays. For some programs, I learned that I was no longer eligible once I went away for college because my school was in another state. For some of my peers, they tried accessing benefits but aged out of the system before ever receiving the benefits – which meant they never received them. Even for programs for which I was eligible, there were always unexpected delays. As a foster youth trying to be successful in school, having to wait months to access important and usually time-sensitive benefits created huge instability in my life, and it discouraged me from continuing to try to access such support from child welfare agencies. While federal and state officials want to provide resources to support foster youth, the unnecessary requirements and delays make these benefits effectively unattainable – having the opposite effect.

THE PROBLEM & CURRENT LAW

When young people age out of foster care with no permanent family to support them, they have to rely solely on themselves, along with whatever support they may be eligible for, to pursue their goals. According to the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), by age 21 at least 26 percent of young people who aged out of foster care in the United States experienced a period or more of homelessness, one-third lacked a high school diploma, and 25 percent had no health insurance (Annie E. Casey Foundation [AECF], 2018).

Thanks to the advocacy of young people who have experienced foster care, Congress has taken action to support youth who are transitioning from foster care to adulthood. The John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee program) was created in 1999 and provides limited funding to help young people aged 14-23 with their transition to adulthood, including funding to support their housing, educational expenses, and financial literacy (“John H. Chafee,” 2021). The Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program specifically provides funding to support higher education for foster youth up to age 23. Total funding per year for these programs is $143 million, which is very limited given that 23,000 youth age out of foster care each year (Gaille, 2017). Surprisingly, some states do not spend all of their Chafee dollars which means many youth do not access this source of support. Among all foster youth who participated in a federally funded transition service in 2015, just 23 percent received education support or employment assistance (AECF, 2018).
In 2020, Congress provided $400 million through the Chafee program to support the immediate needs of young people in foster care during the pandemic (Gaille, 2017). This funding was critical, and many states are still distributing these dollars. Congress also created the Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) program, which increases housing options for young people who have experienced foster care.

All of these programs are critical sources of support for young people in foster care. Although young people need much more support, at minimum they should have access to the benefits for which they are eligible.

**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

I recommend that Congress take the following actions to ensure more young people have access to the important resources that are already available to them:

- **Amend the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee) and Education and Training Voucher (ETV) programs** to allow youth in all states to receive benefits they are entitled up to one year after aging out in cases of bureaucratic or paperwork delays.

- **Encourage states to use all of their Chafee funding each fiscal year.** If states have remaining funds that went unused, require states partner with young people with lived experience in foster care to determine how to ensure that those dollars can most effectively benefit foster youth in that state.

- **Request the Government Accountability Office (GAO) explore how eligibility requirements and application processes across different federal benefit programs can be streamlined** to improve accessibility to these programs such as ETV and the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

- **Require states prepare a comprehensive list of eligible resources for transition-aged youth** in foster care with a requirement to update the list regularly.
ELIMINATING THE FOSTER CARE TO HOMELESSNESS PIPELINE

Anna Rose Thelemaque

RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY

To eliminate the foster care to homelessness pipeline, Congress should (1) ensure every young person up to age 26 has access to affordable, stable housing after exiting the foster care system; (2) create a universal screening program for housing assistance and require it be incorporated into mandatory transition planning for all young people leaving foster care to ensure no young person leaves foster care to homelessness; and (3) establish a Demonstration Program that seeks to forge public/private partnerships between child welfare agencies and landlords/management firms that would agree to hold a specific percentage of housing stock available for young people leaving foster care.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Homelessness is one of the most serious issues that many foster youth experience with twenty percent of foster youth becoming homeless the day they age out of care (Finally Family Homes, 2022). With no single, streamlined system of housing supports for youth transitioning out of foster care into adulthood and no entitlement to room and board while in foster care, it is imperative to expand the existing supports in place to ensure that no foster youth exits care into homelessness and has consistent, stable housing through age 26.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Throughout my experience in foster care, I was moved from three different homes that were all not secure and felt unsafe. When I aged out of foster care, I began college and had no choice but to live on campus. For one of the first times in my life, living on campus allowed me to be in my own safe environment after years of living in foster care. But after my first semester, COVID-19 swept the country and housing insecurity hit me hard. Like many other students across the country, I was forced to leave my dorm, but unlike most of them, I knew I had no "home" to return to.

When I was no longer allowed to live on campus, I sought help from a variety of resources. However, most were unable to provide me with a consistent place to live which resulted in a lengthy period of couch surfing.
PERSONAL REFLECTION (CONTINUED)

I was then told I qualified for the Foster Youth to Independence housing voucher. The voucher should have taken about ninety days to obtain, but took six months plus another three for a landlord to accept it. After three years of dealing with housing insecurity, I finally moved into my first permanent apartment just a week before starting the CCAI summer internship.

While my experience with homelessness may have first been a condition of the pandemic, former foster youth face similar experiences every day. Agencies do not provide adequate housing assistance for foster youth in situations like mine, underscoring the need to have a more robust, guaranteed system of housing support for students and young people who have aged out of the foster care system.

THE PROBLEM & CURRENT LAW

Each year, more than 20,000 youth in foster care turn 18 years old and are expected to start their lives on their own – looking for a job, a place to live, food to eat, and other basic necessities to survive all at once. The transition from foster care often places young people at risk of homelessness and housing instability due to the loss of support the child welfare system should provide.

Twenty percent of foster youth will become homeless the day they age out of care. That means that of the 20,000 who age out each year, approximately 4,000 leave foster care directly into homelessness (Finally Family Homes, 2022). Involvement in the child welfare system is a major predictor for future homelessness; nationwide, 50 percent of the homeless population has spent time in foster care during their life (National Foster Youth Institute, 2021). Often, youth in the foster care system have lived through multiple traumas and disruptive events by the time they begin their transition to adulthood. This can include abuse and/or neglect, multiple foster home placements, lack of continuity in education, and an array of losses of relationships (e.g., friends, family, and/or siblings). These challenges impact the emotional and social development of foster care youth as they transition into adulthood ("Young Adults," n.d.).
Although there is a dedicated system of federal housing support for youth transitioning out of foster care, there is no uniform entitlement for housing support consistent with an entitlement to room and board while in foster care. This means that the majority of youth aging out of care without stable housing are competing for the same limited pot of resources and services that support the entire population of individuals experiencing homelessness.

The Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Act of 2019 made access to Family Unification Vouchers (FUP vouchers) “on-demand” to foster youth who are at risk of homelessness as they transition to adulthood without familial support, ideally making it easier to serve foster youth anywhere they live. Through this new Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) program, Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) assistance was made available to Public Health Authorities (PHA) in partnership with public child welfare agencies. Under the FYI program, “PHAs provide housing assistance on behalf of: youth at least 18 years and not more than 24 years of age (have not reached their 25th birthday) who left foster care, or will leave foster care within 90 days, in accordance with a transition plan described in Section 475(5)(H) of the Social Security Act, and are homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless at age 16 or older” ("S.2803," 2019). This program extended a foster youth’s Family Unification Program (FUP) voucher for up to an additional 24 months as they work toward self-sufficiency, including by participating in a Family Self Sufficiency program.

There is also some funding for housing support available to former foster youth through the John H. Chafee Foster Care for Successful Transition to Adulthood Program (Chafee). The Chafee program provides funding for states, territories, and Indian tribal entities (states) to assist youth in foster care and young adults formerly in foster care with services and financial assistance to promote their transition to adulthood. This includes housing support as well as help with education, employment, financial management, emotional support, and assured connections to caring adults for older youth in foster care (Fernandez-Alcantara, 2019). Still, Chafee funding is limited – $143 million annually to be distributed across the states – and states can only spend 30 percent of their Chafee dollars on housing.
To eliminate the foster care to homelessness pipeline, Congress should:

- Ensure every young person up to age 26 has access to affordable, stable housing after exiting the foster care system by expanding the foster youth to independence program (FYI) which provides housing choice vouchers for up to 36 months to young people who have experienced foster care and are at risk of homelessness or already homeless.

- Limit the universal screening program for housing assistance by requiring that the FYI vouchers become part of a mandatory transition planning for all young people leaving foster care to ensure no young person leaves foster care to homelessness. This screening would be done by a social worker with in-depth knowledge of housing supports for young people and would provide support to the young person up to age 26 to ensure they have housing stability for the period of time after exiting foster care.

- Establish a Demonstration Program that seeks to forge public/private partnerships between child welfare agencies and landlords/management firms that would agree to hold a specific percentage of housing stock available for young people leaving foster care.

There is no uniform federal system of housing support for youth transitioning out of foster care. This means that the majority of youth aging out of care without stable housing are competing for the same limited resources and services that support the entire population of individuals experiencing homelessness.
RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY

To support the mental well-being of youth in the child welfare system, Congress should (1) require caseworkers to conduct regular mental health and wellness check-ins and develop a rapid response plan to address the needs of all young people in foster care; (2) increase the number of mental health providers who accept Medicaid; and (3) encourage states to use enhanced Title IV-E training funds to train child welfare professionals, foster parents and prospective adoptive families and legal guardians on trauma-informed support.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Although foster care is sometimes necessary, some foster youth and adoptees across the country are placed in environments that are unsupportive, or worse, abusive. Oversight in out-of-home placements is limited, and children in the system are often left traumatized, and are forced to deal with the wounds in their adulthood. I recommend that Congress take the necessary steps to protect children and youth in foster and adoptive homes, and provide additional mental health support to help them heal.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

As a baby, I was placed in the foster care system, and from there I experienced moving from one foster home placement to another. Unfortunately, I stayed with several families who were not fit to take care of me, and I was often neglected. In one foster home when I was an infant, because no one picked me up or held me, my head was misshapen when I arrived at my next caretaker family. At two years old, I was adopted and while my adoptive family clothed, fed, and provided me with shelter, I experienced multiple forms of abuse. I was in the care of my adoptive family until I was 17. Before going away to college, I finally had the opportunity to recognize the gravity of how traumatizing these experiences had been.
PERSONAL REFLECTION (CONTINUED)

The relationship with my adoptive family was always unstable, and it became more evident over the course of my college career. Over the past few years, I have been uncovering and unpacking my trauma, and am committed to making sure that my experiences do not happen to other young people. As I look back, I believe that this abuse could have been prevented if there had been different and more effective policies and support in place.

THE PROBLEM & CURRENT LAW

According to the 2020 Child Maltreatment Report, there were 618,000 children who experienced child abuse and neglect (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], 2022a). Neglect is the most common form of maltreatment, followed by physical abuse, sexual abuse, and sex trafficking. Children whose caregivers struggle with substance and domestic abuse are at a higher risk for experiencing child maltreatment. Of these children, 64 percent are removed from their homes due to parental neglect. Although foster care and adoption can be a positive and supportive pathway to permanency, there are some children who have experienced ongoing abuse and have been re-traumatized during their time in foster and adoptive families as well as in group care placements.

Unfortunately, data on the prevalence of abuse at the hands of adoptive and foster parents is limited. According to the 2020 Child Maltreatment Report, abuse by a foster parent occurs in just 0.3% of total child maltreatment cases (HHS, 2022). Given that children are unlikely to report this type of abuse, and given my experience and anecdotal experience from some of my peers, I strongly think that there is reason to believe the real incidence is much higher. More information is available regarding the abuse and neglect of young people placed in foster homes. In fact, there is a growing consensus that many of these placements are at best unhelpful for children’s development, and at worst, harmful, abusive, and traumatizing.
Even for kids in high quality foster placements, the experience of being removed from one’s family and placed into foster care is itself traumatizing (“Healing,” n.d.). Some children experience even more trauma after an adoption has failed and they are placed back into the foster care system. As a result, foster youth are at an increased risk of experiencing mental health challenges throughout their adolescence and later on in adulthood (Lueger-Schuster et al., 2017). Research suggests that adopted children who are nurtured by their parents and guardians are less likely to internalize and externalize problems which speaks to how important it is for adopted children to be placed in the care of nurturing, supportive and well-trained adults (Anthony et al., 2019).

In addition, the child welfare system does not do nearly enough to support the mental health and healing of children and youth who have experienced removal from their biological families and foster care, leaving young people with unaddressed trauma and additional mental and physical health challenges (“Healing,” n.d.). Although Congress has enacted the Health Coordination and Oversight Plans within Title IV-B of the Social Security Act to focus states’ attention on the health needs of children and youth in foster care, these plans do not include mental health supports, and they need more funding, oversight, and resources to ensure that they are well-implemented. To support children who have been adopted, Congress has allocated funding for adoption assistance through the Title IV-E program, which provides some financial assistance to support adoptive families after adoptions from foster care (NACAC, 2021).

States have also stepped up to help support young people in foster care who need additional support and protection. For example, some states have implemented a Bill of Rights for children in foster care which outlines certain rights to which foster youth are entitled to help prevent and address maltreatment while children are in foster care. Other states have established Ombudsman’s offices for foster youth, where they can file concerns and complaints about their experiences in care; however, young people are not always made aware of these supports (“SB 792”, 2021).
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To support the mental well-being of youth in the child welfare system, Congress should:

- **Require caseworkers to conduct regular mental health and wellness check-ins and develop a rapid response plan to address the needs of all young people in foster care.** These meetings must be confidential and take place with young people individually, outside of their foster and adoptive homes, to prevent possible retaliation from an abusive caregiver.

- **Increase the number of mental health providers who accept Medicaid** and are specifically trained in trauma-informed treatment of children and youth in foster care.

- **Encourage states to use enhanced Title IV-E training funds to train child welfare professionals, foster parents, prospective adoptive families, and legal guardians** on trauma-informed support and to connect the young people in their care to available mental health resources.
CREATE OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUNG ADULTS TO THRIVE BY EXTENDING CRITICAL SUPPORTS THROUGH AGE 26

Ryan Young

RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY

In order to create opportunity for young adults to thrive, Congress should (1) increase the federal John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee program) and Education and Training Voucher (ETV) programs age eligibility and foster care services to age 26 in every state, jurisdiction, and tribe; (2) increase ETV benefits for young people aging out of foster care from $5,000 per year for five years consecutively to $7,000 for nine years nonconsecutively to support young people in their postsecondary aspirations; and (3) provide additional funding to support states, jurisdictions and tribes in re-engaging young adults in transition to adulthood between the ages of 18 to 26.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Young adults who are transitioning into adulthood face a steep climb towards self-sufficiency. States and jurisdictions are often unprepared to help former foster youth reach financial independence. That is why Congress should increase the federal Chafee and ETV age eligibility and foster care services to age 26 in every state, jurisdiction, and tribe. Congress should also increase ETV benefits for young people in foster care from $5,000/year for five years consecutively to $7,000 for nine years nonconsecutively to support foster youth in their postsecondary aspirations. In addition, Congress should provide additional funding to support states, jurisdictions, and tribes in re-engaging young adults in transition to adulthood between the ages of 18 to 26. These efforts should be planned and implemented in partnership with young people who possess lived experience in foster care.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Most teenagers in the United States who turn 18 are excited about transitioning to adulthood, which might include going to college, getting their first car, or obtaining their first apartment. Youth who age out of foster care at 18 have the same dreams as their peers, except foster youth oftentimes lack the much-needed support of trusted adults to make these dreams a reality.
PERSONAL REFLECTION (CONTINUED)

Therefore, many foster youth have to navigate adulthood entirely on their own. I know this experience well. As of June 2022, I will have aged out of foster care twice: once at age 18 and again at 21. I chose to re-enter foster care because my state offered extended foster care which provided three more years of resources. Extended foster care has been a lifeline for me; it has given me the support I need to navigate the transition to adulthood successfully.

When I aged out of foster care at 21, I lost the safety net that the extended foster care program provided me. Extended foster care had ensured I had access to financial resources when I needed them, similar to how young adults without foster care backgrounds rely on their parents and families for support. Extended foster care also provided me with a community of peers who could relate to my experience and allowed me to build meaningful, healthy relationships. Additionally, it allowed me to explore educational and career interests. What scared me most about exiting foster care was that I would be on my own with little to no safety net.

THE PROBLEM & CURRENT LAW

Each year, over 23,000 young people age out of the U.S. foster care system (Gaille, 2017). Due to their experience in foster care, these young people face significant barriers to achieve their educational, career, and life goals. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, young people who experience foster care face much lower rates of high school and higher education completion and employment compared to their peers (AECF, 2019). Recognizing how critical the early adulthood period is for everyone, Congress has passed support to young people up to age 21, 23, and in some cases, 26. In 1999, the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee program) was enacted to address and support the needs of foster youth transitioning to adulthood. Currently, the program provides $143 million to state child welfare agencies, and up to $60 million for the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program, which offers $5,000 per foster youth for educational expenses (“John H. Chafee,” 2021).

In 2008, Congress passed the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act which gave states and tribal agencies the option to extend foster care up to age 21 (“Perspectives on fostering connections,” 2013). As part of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in 2008, Congress extended Medicaid eligibility for young people in foster care up to age 26 (Congressional Research Service, 2020). This aligns with other provisions in the ACA that allow young people not in foster care to remain on their parent's insurance plan until age 26.
THE PROBLEM & CURRENT LAW (CONTINUED)

In 2018, as part of the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA), Congress extended age eligibility for both Chafee and ETV programs the option to provide these services up to age 23 and, respectively, to age 26. Currently, as many as 35 states and seven tribes have elected to extend the Chafee age eligibility to age 23 (Williams-Mbengue, 2019).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to create opportunity for young adults to thrive, Congress should:

- **Increase the federal John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee program) and Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program age eligibility and foster care services to age 26 in every state, jurisdiction, and tribe.** This change would increase the number of young people in foster care by one-third and save approximately $4.1 billion through savings in other programs such as homelessness, criminal justice, education, and mental health (AECF, 2019).

- **Increase Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program benefits for young people aging out of foster care from $5,000/year for five years consecutively to $7,000 for nine years nonconsecutively to support young people in their postsecondary aspirations.** These much-needed increases in time and additional financial assistance will increase the national 4 percent standard of young adults who complete higher education degrees in the United States (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.).

- **Provide additional funding to support states, jurisdictions, and tribes in re-engaging young adults in transition to adulthood between the ages of 18 to 26.** These efforts should be implemented in partnership with young people with lived experience in foster care to be included in all levels of the decision-making process. These young people must also reflect the diverse systems that they represent; this means ensuring that diverse communities are represented, such as BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, AAPI, and Tribal youth and families.
THE PROBLEM & CURRENT LAW (CONTINUED)

In 2018, as part of the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA), Congress extended age eligibility for both Chafee and ETV programs the option to provide these services up to age 23 and, respectively, to age 26. Currently, as many as 35 states and seven tribes have elected to extend the Chafee age eligibility to age 23 (Williams-Mbengue, 2019).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to create opportunity for young adults to thrive, Congress should:

- **Increase the federal the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (Chafee) and Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program age eligibility and foster care services to age 26 in every state, jurisdiction, and tribe.** This change would increase the number of young people in foster care by one-third, it would save approximately $4.1 billion through savings in other programs such as homelessness, criminal justice, education, and mental health (AECF, 2019).

- **Increase Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program benefits for young people aging out of foster care from $5,000/year for five years consecutively to $7,000 for nine years nonconsecutively to support young people in their postsecondary aspirations.** These much-needed increases in time and additional financial assistance will increase the national 4 percent standard of young adults who complete higher education degrees in the United States (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.).

- **Provide additional funding to support states, jurisdictions, and tribes in re-engaging young adults in transition to adulthood between the ages of 18 to 26.** These efforts should be implemented in partnership with young people with lived experience in foster care to be included in all levels of the decision-making process. These young people must also reflect the diverse systems that they represent; this means ensuring that diverse communities are represented, such as BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, AAPI, and Tribal youth and families.
April Barcus (CA/NJ)

April Barcus (they/them/their) is currently studying Political Science and Legal Studies at Rutgers University – Newark. They plan to obtain a dual JD/PhD and become a civil rights attorney. April is most proud of their extracurricular work including being involved in multiple collegiate student governments where they have advocated for diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion. They have done a wide array of advocacy work regarding foster care reform. They have assisted in writing legislation and policy to create change, pushed for access to resources for former and current foster youth in under-serviced areas, and helped design and ensure direct cash aid assistance to foster youth during the COVID-19 pandemic. They are also a proud former foster youth and are dedicated to helping others achieve a higher quality of life.

Stormy Lukasavage (KS)

Stormy Lukasavage (he/him/his) is an established professional advocate from Topeka, Kansas who has experience working with FosterClub, National Association of Counsel for Children (NACC), National Foster Youth Institute (NFYI), and the Children’s Bureau in the Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Having joined the Kansas Youth Advisory Council in 2010, Stormy’s advocacy journey began by helping craft the Kansas State Legislature’s Senate Bill No. 23 which enables foster youth the right to graduate from any post-secondary institution with an altered, lower minimum curriculum of 21 credits. This is significant because youth in care often struggle with attaining a high school diploma due to the transitional nature of foster care and this lowered minimum of credits helps elevate graduation rates without sacrificing critical education requirements. Stormy eventually became president of Kansas’ state council and subsequently coordinated two of the biggest youth conferences focused on youth development and life skills in Kansas’ history. In 2019, Stormy graduated with his bachelor’s degree in criminal justice with a minor in acting, the latter he studied in London. Stormy was the first Kansas participant in the prestigious FosterClub All-Star Internship and now works as part of the organization’s National Foster Care Youth and Alumni Policy Council by bringing his experience with the criminal justice system to the policymaking table. Currently, Stormy is planning to attend law school in 2023.
Christina Parker (CA)

Christina Parker (ze/zir/zis) is a recent graduate of the University of Michigan School of Social Work where ze received a master’s degree with a concentration in political science in April 2022. Ze is a California native and graduated from California State University San Bernardino with a Bachelor of Arts in Arabic Language, Culture, and Literature in 2018. Christina has been in service for over a decade to diverse communities who experienced the foster care system, juvenile justice system, and houselessness. Christina’s advocacy and passion for system change started with California Youth Connection (CYC), a foster youth-led organization that empowers communities to use policy, legislation, and advocacy to progress system change. Ze had the honor of working on California’s Foster Youth Bill of Rights (AB175) which includes allowing LGBTQIAS+ youth in care to be placed in gender-affirming facilities and have the right to be called by their chosen name and identified pronouns. Christina has numerous notable legislative wins including the Foster Stability Bill (AB244) which prevents children and youth in foster care from experiencing unnecessary or abrupt placement changes as well as the Placement Stability for Probation Supervised Youth in Foster Care (AB1061) bill which amends a section in AB2247 for juvenile justice-involved youth. Christina has also trained thousands of professionals in effective advocacy, used zir art in spoken word and photography to empower and explore complex topics, and has impacted millions through zir social media company, Everything College, which helps bridge the gap between accessibility and higher education by sharing important information on policies and resources with students.

Nijeria Peterson (MI)

Nijeria Peterson (she/her/hers) is a Michigan native and recent graduate of Western Michigan University (WMU) with a Bachelor of Administration in Business Law. Nijeria has a passion for learning about the law and working with teams to build leadership skills while advocating for change within the foster care system. Nijeria was active in the Criminal Justice Association on WMU’s campus where she was able to learn about the intersection between business and the law in addition to other aspects involving the legal system. Nijeria was also an active member of both the Business Law Society and Black Student Union. While pursuing her undergraduate degree, Nijeria had the opportunity to study abroad in South Africa, Cape Town which gave her the chance to learn about different cultures in a new environment. Nijeria's various experiences have taught her about leadership roles in unique environments and how to work with diverse teams. Nijeria enjoys broadening her network and working with peers who also have a passion for the law and changing the conversation and policies around foster care. Nijeria plans to continue her passion by attending law school and building a legal career to help underserved populations.
Meet the Authors Continued

**Anna Rose Thelemaque (CT)**

Anna Rose Thelemaque (she/her/hers) is a rising senior at the University of Connecticut with an anticipated graduation of May 2023. Anna is pursuing a dual degree in human development and political science. Through her studies, Anna is learning how human development – the brain and its growth physically, emotionally, and socially – overlaps with politics and the law. Anna's experience and involvement in state-level advocacy work led her to choose this course of study. Anna presented on what additional support, training, or improvements could be made to aid foster youth in finding and maintaining housing at Connecticut’s “Youth at the Capitol” event in February 2022. Anna aspires to pursue a law degree after her undergraduate studies because she is highly motivated to use both her experiences in academics and as someone with lived experience in foster care to advocate for clients who come from backgrounds of trauma.

**Angulina Wilson (FL)**

**Congressional Office: U.S. Representative Abigail Spanberger (VA)**

Angulina (Lina) Wilson (she/her/hers) is a rising senior at the University of South Florida (USF) in Tampa pursuing a bachelor’s degree in public health. Lina is a resilient, adaptable, and flexible leader originally from Jacksonville, Florida. She realized early on that she wanted to create real, long-lasting change which inspired her to pursue her studies in the health sector. Lina is passionate about helping others, especially those who she shares similar experiences with such as lived experience in the foster care system. This passion continues to drive Lina in her work. At her university, Lina is involved in many extracurricular activities including the Health Occupations Students of America Club, Black Student Union, and Kurl Friends. Kurl Friends is focused on educating individuals about their natural hair while striving to build a positive community at USF and Lina serves as the Parliamentarian Executive Board Member. Additionally, Lina most recently worked in the Department of Women and Gender Studies at the University of South Florida as an office assistant.
Ryan Young (he/him/his) is a child welfare advocate, consultant, and author with lived experiences from Arizona’s foster care system and as an adoptee from his birth country of Ukraine. Ryan has devoted himself to public service, advocacy, and consultation in reforming the child welfare system through local, state, and national efforts. Ryan is the current President of the Arizona Department of Child Safety’s (DCS) Youth Empowerment Council. Ryan also serves as a delegate to represent Arizona within the National Foster Youth Institute, federal reviewer of the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) with the U.S. Children’s Bureau, Chair of Arizona’s Chapter with the Foster Care Alumni of America, member of the FosterEQUALITY Lived-Experience Team with FosterClub, a spokesperson with AdoptUSKids, constitute consultant with Casey Family Programs, a commissioner on the City of Phoenix Youth and Education Commission, and an Arizona consultant for Thriving Families, Safer Children Initiative. Governor Ducey recently appointed Ryan to serve on the Council on Child Safety and Family Empowerment in addition to the National Foster Care Youth and Alumni Policy Council. Additionally, Ryan serves as a peer mentor at Arizona’s Children Association. Ryan is pursuing a degree in Political Science at Phoenix College as a Nina Mason Pulliam Legacy and AFFFC Scholar. He plans to continue his studies at Arizona State University to obtain a Bachelor of Science in Public Service and Public Policy with a concentration on social service delivery in fall 2023. He loves to travel, spend time with family and friends, and roller-skate in his own free time.
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TO THE CCAI BOARD OF DIRECTORS & PARTNERS:
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Kate, Angie, Sara, and Isabelle - thank you for your continued support, encouragement, and commitment to uplift our voices. You make a world a better place for youth in the U.S foster care and child welfare system. A big thank you to the CCAI summer team as well - Audrey, Joey, Lisette, and Rikki.
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The 2022 CCAI Foster Youth Internship Program® would not be possible without the generosity of our partners. Thank you for your investment in the Foster Youth Interns.

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