

# Housing Stability for Transition Age Youth in Foster Care



## Background

Far too many youth currently and formerly in foster care experience housing instability and homelessness, which leads to further trauma, negatively impacts their well-being, and impedes their transition into adulthood. For instance, homeless youth experience worse physical and mental health, higher rates of substance use disorders, higher rates of being victims of crime or engaging in criminal activity, and greater barriers to education and employment than their peers who have not been homeless.<sup>i</sup>

To address the poor outcomes and high rates of homelessness that youth often faced when they were forced to exit foster care at age 18, in 2010, California enacted legislation extending foster care up to age 21. Despite this extension, youth often continue to face homelessness and deep poverty, even while participating in extended foster care. According to a recent study, over half of youth in foster care experienced couch-surfing and/or homelessness between ages 17 and 21.<sup>ii</sup>

Long transitional housing program waitlists, barriers to housing program entry or retention, and unaffordable housing options contribute to this problem. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis further exacerbated the situation. In a study of the experiences of 18–23-year-old youth in foster care and aged out of foster care, almost half of respondents reported COVID-19 having a negative impact on their living situation.<sup>iii</sup>

In the past few years, advocates, providers, the counties, and policymakers have worked to address these barriers. For instance, in 2018, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) convened a workgroup to help identify regulatory updates that have the potential to improve foster youth's access to and retention in transitional housing programs. Additionally, in 2019, the Legislature established housing navigators to help youth in foster care and other young people ages 18 to 21 access needed housing. That same year, the state also expanded transitional housing programs for youth in foster care and made other investments to help address housing instability and homelessness among youth in foster care and young people more broadly, including allocating a minimum of 8% of Homeless Housing, Assistance, and Prevention Program funds to go toward serving homeless youth, extending the Homeless Youth Emergency Services and Housing Program, and providing funding to address housing insecurity amongst college students.

Additionally, in 2020, the Legislature passed AB 1979 (Friedman) which (1) requires evaluations of communities' abilities to meet the emergency housing needs of youth in extended foster care; (2) develops capacity to meet the immediate housing needs of young people who are re-entering foster care or between placements until stable housing is secured; (3) streamlines the Supervised Independent Living Placement (SILP) approval process; and (4) promotes placement stability by clarifying counties may "hold" placements for up to 14 days under specified circumstances that indicate the youth will return to the placement. Policymakers also included a \$4 million augmentation of the Transitional Housing Program – Non-Minor Dependent (THP-NMD) rate in the 2020-21 state budget for a housing supplement to support programming for parenting youth in extended foster care and better reflect the variability of housing costs across the state.

Finally, the 2021-22 state budget established an 8% set-aside of funds in the Homekey Program (representing at least \$110.2 million in 2021-22 and \$98.8 million in 2022-23) for projects serving youth experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, including youth currently and formerly in foster care through the age of 25.

## Next Steps

Significant work remains to ensure young people currently and formerly in foster care have access to the safe and affordable housing they need to stabilize and successfully transition to adulthood. Moving forward, it will be important to build on the progress made and for the state, counties, advocates, providers, and youth to collaborate to ensure the Homekey Program meets the needs of youth in foster care experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness.

For more information, contact Susanna Kniffen at [skniffen@childrennow.org](mailto:skniffen@childrennow.org).

<sup>i</sup> Morton, et al. "Prevalence and Correlates of Youth Homelessness in the United States," *Journal of Adolescent Health* (2018), 62(1):14-21, available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29153445>; U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Higher Education: Actions Needed to Improve Access to Federal Financial Assistance for Homeless and Foster Youth* (2016), available at <https://www.gao.gov/assets/680/677325.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> Feng, H., Harty, J., Okpych, N. J., & Courtney, M. E. (2020). *Memo from CalYOUTH: Predictors of homelessness at age 21*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago

<sup>iii</sup> [Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice & Research, 2020](#)