

Federal Policies Impacting Older Youth in and Leaving Foster Care

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Federal Funding/Programs With the Large Impact on Older Youth in and Leaving Foster Care

- Title IV-E of the Social Security Act
 - The Chafee Foster Care Program for a Successful Transition to Adulthood
 - The Chafee Education and Training Voucher Program
- Currently, Congress and the Administration are focusing on Chafee and ETV



Chafee Basics

- The law can be found within Title IV-E of the Social Security Act at 42 U.S.C.A. § 677.
- Enacted in 1999, it has been amended approximately 6 times since its enactment.
 - Expansion of eligibility
 - To age 14 and the option to serve youth until age 23. (See if your state has taken this option.)
 - To youth who leave to guardianship or adoption at age 16
 - Expansion of purpose to include normalcy activities and connections with supportive adults.
 - Change in name to highlight interdependence
 - Creation of a re-allotment process to redistribute unspent funds.
 - The Chafee Act was amended in 2001 to add the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program, 42 U.S.C.A. §677 (i), which provides up to \$5000 per youth to cover the cost of postsecondary education and training.



Chafee and ETV Basics

- Eligible youth can be served with Chafee services in CA until age 21, and include:
 - Children and youth in foster care between ages 14 – 21;
 - Youth who aged out and are between 18 – 21;
 - Youth who leave foster care at age 16 or older for guardianship or adoption and are under 21;
 - Youth who were in foster care between 14 – 21 and left for reasons besides aging out, kinship guardianship or adoption.
- Youth can receive ETV funding for up to 5 years or until they turn age 26, whichever comes first.



Chafee and ETV Basics

- Chafee is a mandatory funding stream. (ETV is discretionary).
- It has remained at around \$140-143 million.
- If all eligible youth in 2021—444,348 youth—received Chafee services with a \$143 million allocation, there would be \$321.82 per youth.
- Funds are allocated to states based on their “foster care ratio,” which is the number of children in foster care in a state in the most recent fiscal year to the total number of children in foster care in all States for the most recent fiscal year.
- States must provide a 20% match to their Chafee and ETV allocations.
 - Many states invest well more than a 20% match to provide services to older youth.
- States have 2 years to spend their allocation.



Chafee and ETV in CA

- Allotments:
 - In 2025, CA was allotted around \$17 million in Chafee funds (this includes CA's successful request for unused funds from other states): [pi-26-03-state-allotment-tables.pdf](#)
 - In 2025, CA was allotted around \$5.8 million in Education and Training Voucher funds (this includes CA's successful request for unused funds from other states): [pi-26-03-state-allotment-tables.pdf](#)
- Youth Served in 2023:
 - In FY 2023, CA served less than half (8,234) of the 18,768 eligible youth. ([CFSP 2025-2029](#), page 113-114)
 - In award year 2023-2024, 4,408 youth were paid an ETV award ([CFSP 2025-2029](#), page 109). CA maintains an ETV waiting list because its allocation does not cover all eligible youth.



Trends in Chafee Spending Across the Country and in CA

- While there is great need for Chafee and ETV services and funds, some states are not able to get out funds and programming to youth, resulting in some states returning funds.
- Nationally, only about 23% of eligible youth receive a Chafee service and about 37% of eligible youth receive ETV funds.
- Concern about the challenges in the Chafee and ETV Program have been highlighted by a GAO Report requested by long time champion for youth in foster care, Senator Grassley: **GAO Report: HHS Should Help States Address Barriers to Using Federal Funds for Programs Serving Youth Transitioning to Adulthood**
- In 2021, California:
 - Had 19, 057 youth ages 14-21 in foster care.
 - Of this number, 57% or 27,928 received a Chafee services. Regularly uses all of its Chafee funds and requests unspent funds.
 - Regularly uses all of its ETV funds and maintains a waiting list.
 - The award has been reduced from \$5000 per youth to meet the needs of more youth.
 - Like most other states, CA continues to show poor outcomes for youth leaving foster care in critical areas like homelessness, employment, and connections with family and supportive adults.

[Fostering Youth Transitions-California Profile](#)



Congress and the Administration Are Elevating the Need for Reform and Modernization for Older Youth in and From Foster Care

- [Executive Order: Fostering the Future for American Children and Families](#)
- The First Lady as a champion for older youth in foster care.
 - [First Lady Melania Trump's 10 Achievements Transforming Outcomes for Foster Youth Since the Signing the Fostering the Future Executive Order 180 Days Ago – The White House](#)
 - [First Lady Melania Trump Secures \\$25M Investment In President's FY26 Budget for Foster Youth](#)
- Congressional Hearings
 - [Hearing on Pathways to Independence: Supporting Youth Aging Out of Foster Care](#) (Jan 17, 2024).
 - [Aging Out Is Not A Plan: Reimagining Futures for Foster Youth](#) (June 12, 2025).
 - [Hearing on Harnessing Innovation & New Technology to Help America's Foster Youth Succeed](#) (November 17, 2025).



Federal Bills Advancing In Congress

1. HR 7343, Foster Youth Workforce Opportunity Act
 2. H.R.7432, Foster Youth Housing Opportunity Act
 3. H.R.7463, Foster Youth Postsecondary Education Access and Success Act
 4. H.R.7655, Support for Expectant and Parenting Foster Youth Act
 5. H.R.7529, Fresh Starts for Foster Youth Act
 6. HR 7995, Chafee Opportunities for New Networks and Existing Connection Trust Act or the “CONNECT Act
- These bills were combined into one bill, now titled Fostering the Future Act and numbered HR 7432
- The package was passed in the full House on May 19th
- Several companion bills have been introduced in Congress:
- ◆ **Foster Youth Education and Workforce Opportunity Act of 2026, S. 4314**, which combines HR 7463 and HR 7343
 - ◆ The Connect Act, S. 4634, which mirrors HR 7995



Potential Impacts in CA of the Fostering the Future Package

- The bill provides positive policy updates and modernizations that will benefit youth generally and could increase the number of youth receiving a Chafee service.
- The improvements to ETV, especially providing the option to give youth a grace period when they are at risk of losing ETV funds, is likely to improve student retention.
- The significant challenge of the package is that it does not include any new funding. As a state that already spends all of its Chafee and ETV funds each year, CA can update programs to reflect the new policies, but will have a hard time serving more young people.



Appropriations Request

- John Burton Advocates for Youth is leading an appropriations requests for ETV.
- Senators Adam Schiff and Padilla are requesting that the ETV appropriation be increased to \$150 million.
- If successful, the increased funding would help CA meet the growing demand for ETV funds.



Potential Actions to Help Ensure Positive Impacts on TAY in CA and Nationwide

- Support the Fostering Futures package and advocate in the Senate for complementary bills that increase the Chafee and ETV allocations along with the ETV appropriations request.
- Introduce or support state legislation to modernize the Chafee service array and increase youth awareness and engagement in the Chafee program.
- Propose a budget request that provide state funds to enable the Chafee program to increase participation and meet the need for ETV for eligible youth.



Other Federal Bills We Are Watching

- Increasing Access to Foster Care Through Age 21 Act, [HR 8498](#)
 - Protecting Sibling Relationships in Foster Care Act, [HR 8566](#)
 - Informed Foster Youth Act of 2026, [S 4556](#)
 - [Housing Opportunities for Moving to Empowerment for Foster Youth Act or the “HOME for Foster Youth Act”](#)
- Summaries can be found here: [TAY Bills Introduced in the 119th Congress - Google Docs](#)
- Tracker: [Federal Legislation — Journey to Success](#)



Resources

- Youth Law Center's Federal Youth Policy Briefing–May 2026
- Federal Legislation Tracker— Journey to Success
- TAY Bills Introduced in the 119th Congress - Google Docs
- To learn about the history and basics of the Chafee Program:
 - Watch the Chafee 101 webinar.
 - Download the Presentation
- To learn about the history and basics of the Education and Training Voucher Program:
 - Watch the ETV 101 Webinar
 - Download the Presentation

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Q & A



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