

SUMMARY OF PROVISIONS IMPACTING TRANSITION AGE YOUTH IN THE RECENTLY PASSED FEDERAL STIMULUS AND FUNDING PACKAGE

Below are key elements of the COVID relief and spending package passed by Congress on December 22nd that impact transition age youth in and leaving foster care. A more detailed summary of the child welfare provisions will follow. Please note that the bill does not become law until it is signed by the President.

A. INCREASE AND EXPANSION OF CHAFEE

- Increase in Chafee Funds by 400 million.
- No state match is required for this increased Chafee allocation.
- Youth are Chafee eligible until reaching age 27.
- States can lift the 30% cap on room and board and provide room and board to young people who are between ages 18 and 27 and have experienced foster care at 14 years of age or older.
- States can spend up to \$4000 per youth for costs related to driving and getting a driver's license.
- These provisions are effective through FY 2021.

B. EDUCATION AND TRAINING VOUCHERS

- At least 50 of the 400 million Chafee allocation must be used for Education and Training Vouchers (ETV).
- The maximum ETV award is \$12,000 per individual youth per year (from \$5000) through FY 2022.
- Waiver of the enrollment and satisfactory academic progress requirements (SAP) for ETV through FY 2021 if young people are unable to meet the requirement due to the pandemic.
- Through FY 2021, ETV funds can be used for maintaining training and postsecondary education, including less than full-time matriculation costs or other expenses that are not part of the cost of attendance but would help support youth in remaining enrolled.

C. PREVENTING YOUTH FROM AGING OUT + PROVIDING RE-ENTRY

- A state cannot require a child to leave foster care due to age (21).
- Young people can remain IV-E eligible even if they are not able to meet the participation (work and school) requirements for extended foster care and if they are 21.
- States are required ("shall") to provide re-entry to foster care to youth who aged out during the pandemic and have not attained age 22 and must facilitate the re-entry process.
- States must continue to follow all requirements related to permanency and transition planning.
- These provisions are effective through FY 2021 and apply to all states and territories.

D. PROVISIONS TO NOTIFY YOUNG PEOPLE AND STREAMLINE ACCESS TO ASSISTANCE

- States must notify young people about expanded Chafee eligibility and services, the moratorium, and the re-entry provisions.
- The law prohibits HHS from requiring states to provide "proof of a direct connection to the pandemic if doing so would be administratively burdensome or would otherwise delay or impede the ability of the State to serve foster youth."

E. GENERAL CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM PROVISIONS

- Waives the state match for evidence-based mental health, substance abuse, and parenting skill prevention services.
- Provides \$85 million in emergency funding for the MaryLee Allen Promoting Safe and Stable Families program.
- Provides \$10 million for the Court Improvement Program and waives the state match for the new funds.
- Allows program flexibilities in the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Education Home Visiting program.
- Provides \$20 million for kinship navigator programs, waives the state match and allows states to use models not yet in the Evidence Clearinghouse for kinship navigator programs.
- Makes a technical correction to Title IV-E treatment of the 6.2% Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) increase for Family First Transition Act funding.
- Provisions are effective through FY 2021.

F. MAKING FYI PERMANENT + THE FAMILY UNIFICATION PROGRAM

- Makes the Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) program permanent in statute. This program provides a three year housing voucher to young people aging out of foster care without a plan for housing and young adults who were in foster care and become homeless.
- Extends the FYI voucher term by 2 additional years for individuals participating in the Family Self-Sufficiency Program (FSS) or similar self-sufficiency activities .
- Provide \$25 million for the Family Unification Program (FUP). \$20 million of these funds are for vouchers for young people.

G. GENERAL HOUSING PROVISIONS

- \$25 billion for rental assistance for states and localities.
- An extension of the existing eviction moratorium through January 31, 2021.

H. DIRECT PAYMENTS (STIMULUS CHECKS)

- \$600 for an eligible individual and qualifying children.

I. SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

- 15% increase in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefit for all recipients.

J. RELIEF FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS + STUDENTS

- \$22.7 billion allocated to a Higher Education Relief Fund for colleges and universities. At least half of this amount must go directly to students in the form of additional financial aid.
- Increases the maximum Pell grant award by \$150, from \$6,345 to \$6,495 for the 2021-2022 academic year.

K. REAL ACT PROVISIONS: REMOVING BARRIERS TO PELL GRANT ELIGIBILITY TO INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE INCARCERATED AND WITH PRIOR DRUG CONVICTIONS

- Makes individuals serving a “criminal sentence in a Federal, State, or local penal institution, prison, jail, reformatory, work farm, or other similar correctional institution” eligible to receive Pell Grant funds if they are enrolled in or accepted to a Prison Education Program.
- Removes the prohibition on federal student aid for students with drug convictions that occurred while they were receiving federal student aid.

L. STREAMLINING THE FAFSA FOR YOUTH WITH EXPERIENCE IN FOSTER CARE + HOMELESSNESS

- Eliminates the requirement that the status of foster youth and unaccompanied homeless youths be re-determined every year.
- Expands the list of officials and programs that may verify that an applicant is an unaccompanied homeless youth.
- Requires financial aid administrators to make a determination of unaccompanied homeless youth status for youth who cannot get determinations from other authorities based on either a written statement from or documented interview with the student.
- Requires the development of a simplified FAFSA with a single question on homeless status.
- To verify a youth’s foster care status, institutions must accept official state documents, an electronic data match with the state agency, a documented phone call with a county agency, foster care provider, attorney or CASA, or verification that the student is eligible for a Chafee ETV grant.
- Allows financial aid administrators to make a determination of independent status for students who do not qualify under other criteria based on “other unusual circumstances in which the student is unable to contact a parent or where contact with parents poses a risk to such student.” This can include circumstances of human trafficking, refugee or asylum status, parental abandonment or parental imprisonment.
- These provisions take effect on July 1, 2023.

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