

PRESS RELEASE

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PENNSYLVANIA GOVERNOR TOM CORBETT TAKES MAJOR STEP TO HELP FOSTER YOUTH SUCCEED

PHILADELPHIA, PA (July 2, 2012) – Pennsylvania foster youth - who often face enormous obstacles to success as adults – will receive a major boost when Governor Tom Corbett signs new legislation into law. The new laws will enable Pennsylvania to enhance support for older foster youth, encourage adoption and save money.

Juvenile Law Center applauds these actions by Pennsylvania’s General Assembly and Governor Corbett. Pennsylvania will save \$4.5 million in the coming fiscal year by fully implementing the older youth provisions of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008. The federal law was passed with bi-partisan support in the last months of the Bush Administration.

In addition to being cost-effective, these changes in Pennsylvania law implement commonsense changes to the Commonwealth’s foster care policies. The new laws will improve the likelihood that more youth in foster care will be adopted and gain the permanent homes they deserve. The laws ensure that youth will not be forced out of foster care when they turn 18, but instead, like older teens living in their own homes, foster youth will now be able to have the additional support they need to make a successful transition to adulthood. The new laws will give county children and youth agencies the resources they need to give foster youth meaningful support.

Juvenile Law Center Supervising Attorney Jennifer Pokempner explained the importance of the new laws. “This legislation not only ensures that older foster youth will get the support they need and deserve as they make the transition to adulthood. It challenges everyone involved to do better by foster youth who desperately need our support. We must now intensify our efforts to find families for older youth in foster care so that they do not age out of foster care before they are ready to be on their own.”

The new laws have several important provisions:

- First, families that want to adopt or provide permanent guardianship to older youth from foster care can receive a subsidy until the youth reaches 21. The absence of such a subsidy has been a long-standing disincentive to adoption and guardianship, leaving too many youth lingering in foster care even though a permanent family setting was available.

- Second, foster youth who do not find permanency by age 18, but are not ready to be independent, will have a meaningful opportunity to successfully make the transition to adulthood. Currently, Pennsylvania only extends foster care to age 21 for youth under certain circumstances, such as when a foster youth is working toward a high school diploma, enrolled in post-secondary education or receiving medical treatment. The new laws expand the criteria, allowing foster care to continue to age 21 for youth who are enrolled in job training or working at least 80 hours a month.
- Finally, the new laws allow youth who age out of foster care at age 18 or older to re-enter foster care before turning age 21. Many foster youth who age out do not have the safety net of family to buffer the unexpected challenges that youth face as they become young adults. While youth who grow up in families often leave and return home as they find their place in the world, Pennsylvania foster youth have not had this option.

“The passage of this legislation bodes well for improved life chances for older youth in foster care,” says Juvenile Law Center Board Member Mark Courtney, of Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. Courtney’s extensive research shows that allowing foster youth to remain in state care through age 21 significantly improves their prospects by increasing college enrollment, increasing earnings, delaying pregnancy and contributing to housing stability. “Remaining in foster care provides these vulnerable young people access to a wide array of services that they need,” Courtney said. “Moreover, cost-benefit analysis shows that the benefits to the youth and society of extending foster care to age 21 are over twice as great as the costs to government.”

Juvenile Law Center worked closely with Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children to promote passage of the new laws.

Juvenile Law Center is a national, non-profit, public interest law firm that advances and protects the rights and well-being of children in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Juvenile Law Center is also a resource for other legal advocacy groups across the nation. For additional information, visit our website at www.jlc.org or call Marie Yeager at (717) 817-333 or Jenny Pokempner at (215) 625-0551.

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