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Governor's Proposed Budget Prioritizes Ohio's Most Vulnerable Young Citizens
Proposal Includes Funds for Youth Who Age Out of Foster Care

COLUMBUS, OH – Today Gov. John Kasich unveiled his budget priorities, including funding to launch Ohio's new program to support young people aging out of foster care. Established through the passage of Ohio House Bill 50 in 2016, the new statewide program, now known as "Bridges," will provide housing and supportive services to youth who age out of foster care, and those adopted after age 16, through their 21st birthdays.

"We are grateful to the Governor for his continued support of the Bridges program and Ohio's young people," said Mark Mecum, director, Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies (OACCA). "By securing this funding, we can implement an innovative program, based on best practices we know will change the status quo and give foster youth better opportunities to succeed."

The Governor's budget proposal funds the Bridges program at \$11 million of state funds per year. The program, which was formerly referred to as Ohio Fostering Connections, is expected to launch in late 2017 and will serve up to 3,000 eligible young adults.

Each year, more than 1,000 Ohio youth "age out" of foster care at age 18. Bridges will include a package of programs to help these young people prepare for college or a career, as well as transitional housing options, including apartment programs, campus housing, and foster and host homes.

The program received bipartisan and nearly unanimous support in the legislature when House Bill 50 was passed. The bill became a state law on July 1, 2016, and since that time the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services has overseen the implementation planning effort. HB 50 also authorized a steering committee to help with implementation which includes representatives from OACCA, the courts, and foster youth and alumni.

In 2016, Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteers worked with 311 Ohio foster youth over the age of 18. "They are more likely to drop out of school, become parents before they are ready, experience homelessness, fall victim to human trafficking, be unemployed or incarcerated," said Doug Stephens, executive director, Ohio CASA. "Thanks to the Governor's support of this program, more resources will be available to help teens like these avoid these devastating consequences and become productive citizens."

The investment in Bridges ultimately will save taxpayer dollars. According to national figures, on average, for every young person who ages out of foster care without continued support, communities pay \$300,000 in social costs over that person's lifetime.

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Similar programs in 26 other states are showing benefits including higher levels of educational attainment, employment, and tax revenue, and lower levels of homelessness, incarceration, and unplanned pregnancies. In addition to state funds, the Ohio program leverages federal funds available through the Fostering Connection to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008.

Makkedah Cutshall is one of the former foster youth who advocated for the Bridges program.

“My brothers and sisters in foster care face many challenges and obstacles without having parental support like other kids,” she said. “With some added services to bridge the gap after we age out, we have a better opportunity to rise out of the circumstances we’re in due to no fault of our own. While the program won’t be in place in time to help me, I’m glad it will help other teens so they don’t have to face the difficulties I endured.”

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About Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies

Founded in 1973 as Ohio’s first statewide child advocacy organization, OACCA provides leadership for Ohio’s at-risk children, families, and community providers. Visit oacca.org for more information.

Relevant Links

Implementation Recommendations

[The Governor’s Video Message on Passage of HB 50](#)
[Sobering Statistics Infographic](#)
[Benefits of Doing it Right Infographic](#)
[Cost of Doing it Right Infographic](#)
[Faces of Foster Care Video](#)
[Ohio Fostering Connections Report](#)