



Ohio Fostering Connections

Supporting Ohio Foster Youth Through Age 21

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Stark Realities Face Foster Care Youth at Graduation Time

Movement on legislation providing hope that Ohio Senate will pass bill to extend critical supports to youth aging out of foster care

COLUMBUS, OH – For most high school graduates, May is a time to celebrate an important milestone in their life, but, for many of Ohio's foster youth, turning 18 and tossing their graduation cap in the air can also signal losing the supports-financial, educational, social and otherwise-that they count on. However, there is reason to believe that help is on the horizon for Ohio's foster youth who find themselves "graduating out" at age 18.

The Ohio Senate Finance Committee held the first hearing on Amended Substitute House Bill 50 on April 26 and heard testimony from bill co-sponsors Rep. Dorothy Pelanda (R-Marysville) and Rep. Cheryl Grossman (R- Grove City). The bill creates a new program to serve youth who age out of foster care, and those adopted after age 16, through their 21st birthdays. The bill passed the Ohio House late last year.

A second Senate Finance Committee hearing, with testimony from Mark Mecum, Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies; Michael Outrich, former foster youth; and Jen Schwitzgebel, Buckeye Ranch, is scheduled for next Tuesday at 3 p.m.

"This is an important step in our journey to provide a stronger foundation for Ohio's foster youth," said Mark Mecum, chair, Ohio Fostering Connections. "We applaud Sen. Scott Oelslager for taking action on the legislation, and we urge the full Senate to make this bill a priority before the session adjourns. Ohio's most vulnerable young people need our help now."

Each year, more than 1,000 Ohio youth "age out" of foster care at age 18. House Bill 50 includes 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.

What should be a gradual transition is often an abrupt loss that puts Ohio's foster youth at risk of numerous negative outcomes. Research indicates that foster care alumni are at high risk of homelessness, unemployment, insufficient education, dependence on public assistance, human trafficking, incarceration and other devastating outcomes.

A companion bill, Senate Bill 240, was introduced last November by Ohio Sen. John Eklund (R – Munson Township).

National Precedent

The Ohio Fostering Connections initiative is more than six years in the making and utilizes a proven approach. Similar programs in 26 other states are showing benefits including higher levels of educational attainment and employment, and lower levels of homelessness and incarceration. The Ohio legislation taps federal funds available through the Fostering Connection to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 to defray approximately two thirds of the costs.

This investment will ultimately 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.

Compelling Testimony

More than 20 individuals and groups have provided testimony supporting the legislation. Advocates include former foster youth, foster care professionals, social organizations and public officials.

Excerpts from some of the bill testimony include:

"At the age of 18, I wasn't ready to become fully independent, honestly, I don't think anyone is, but I didn't get that choice. Had I been given the choice, not to be in foster care, but to have the continued support of the foster care system such as a mentor... I would have said yes. And I am 100% sure that I would have been successful and able to finish school, keep my own place, and I would be a social worker right now. Foster youth, current and future, need these supports and we can put that into action."

Nicole Chinn, former foster youth

"In the last five years, the Junior League of Cleveland has been working with older youth in foster care with the goal of improving outcomes for youth aging out of foster care. Through our volunteer efforts, we have worked with youth at the precipice of independence. Often these young people lack the adequate skills for life on their own—whether financial, awareness of community resources, or basic homemaking skills. HB 50 will enable the PCSAs to provide that much needed additional support through quality services and programs specifically designed to meet the needs of the emerging adult."

Annemarie M. Grassi, Ph.D., president, Junior League of Cleveland

"I have been an advocate for youth in our foster care system for many years and applaud the provisions in this legislation to extend benefits to age 21. Foster youth who lack a reliable support system are thrust into a harsh reality when they 'age out' of the child welfare system and this is a step in the right direction to give them more time to make the transition to adulthood while still having a formal support system."

Mike DeWine, Ohio Attorney General

Ohio House Bill 50 and Senate Bill 240 also have received support from the [Canton Repository](#), [Cincinnati Enquirer](#), [Cleveland Plain Dealer](#), and [Columbus Dispatch](#).

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About Ohio Fostering Connections

Ohio Fostering Connections is funded by the Cleveland Foundation, Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, George Gund Foundation, Greater Cincinnati Foundation, Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, Lighthouse Youth Services, and Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies. More than 40 organizations from across Ohio endorse the initiative, as well. OhioFosteringConnections.org

***Relevant
Links***

[Sobering Statistics Infographic](#)
[Benefits of Doing it Right Infographic](#)
[Cost of Doing it Right Infographic](#)
[Faces of Foster Care Video](#)
[Ohio Fostering Connections Report](#)

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