



# Ohio Fostering Connections

Supporting Ohio Foster Youth Through Age 21

OFC Contact: Mark Mecum  
[mmecum@oacca.org](mailto:mmecum@oacca.org) | 614.461.0014

PR Contact: Michelle Bretscher  
[bretscherm@gmail.com](mailto:bretscherm@gmail.com) | 614.499.0889

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## **Governor Signs Bill to Build Brighter Future for Ohio's Foster Youth** ***House Bill 50 Extends Transitional Support Through Age 21***

COLUMBUS, OH – Today Gov. John Kasich signed a bill into law that will improve the lives of some of Ohio's most vulnerable young citizens. Ohio House Bill 50 creates a new program to serve youth who age out of foster care, and those adopted after age 16, through their 21st birthdays.

"Today marks an important milestone for Ohio that was three years in the making. We are grateful to the Governor and Ohio General Assembly for their overwhelming support," said Mark Mecum, chair, Ohio Fostering Connections and executive director of the Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies. "Together, we can now implement a program that will change the status quo and give young Ohioans better opportunities to succeed."

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.

The bill and was introduced in February 2015 by Reps. Dorothy Pelanda (R-Marysville) and Cheryl Grossman (R-Grove City). It passed the House in December 2015 and the Senate in May 2016. In addition, Sen. John Eklund (R-Munson Township) introduced a companion bill in the Senate.

### **Next Steps**

Officially, the bill will become a state law – the Ohio Fostering Connections Act – on July 1, 2016. The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services will receive an appropriation of \$550,000 to fund its year-long implementation planning effort. The Ohio Fostering Connections Task Force formed small workgroups to develop best practice recommendations for ODJFS to help kick off the planning process.

Implementation of the extended supports to foster youth is expected to occur in about 18 months. The implementation funding will be appropriated in the next biennial budget legislation (SFY 18-19).

### **Fiscal and Social Benefits**

This investment 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.

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.

More

Michael Outrich is one of the former foster youth who testified to the Ohio General Assembly as a proponent of House Bill 50. “Throughout the last few years I have watched and witnessed my fellow brothers and sisters of the foster care system struggle. I’ve experienced days of discouragement when I faced obstacles with no parental support, and no idea of what resources might exist to help me,” Outrich said in his testimony. “Improving outcomes matters – and I am confident that extending services and supports through proper case management, housing, and a support system can and will improve outcomes for our population.”

More than 30 other individuals and groups provided testimony supporting the legislation during hearings in the House and Senate. Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine is among the bill’s proponents. The legislation also received support from the [Canton Repository](#), [Cincinnati Enquirer](#), [Cleveland Plain Dealer](#), and [Columbus Dispatch](#).

Participants in the bill signing included Mecum and Kelly Vyzral, Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies; Jamole Callahan, former foster youth and advocate; Jermaine Ferguson, former foster youth and advocate; Rita Soronen, Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption; and Meredith Hicks, Lighthouse Youth Services.

The Ohio Fostering Connections initiative began in 2010 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.

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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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