



Policy and Practice Recommendations

To make a successful transition to adulthood by age 25, every young person requires a permanent family that provides an enduring source of emotional support; services and supports that are racially and ethnically equitable; a stable education that includes post-secondary opportunities; opportunities to achieve economic success; a place to live that is safe, stable and affordable; access to comprehensive, coordinated health and mental health care; and opportunities to be listened to, to be informed, to be respected, and to exert control over one's life. To ensure that all youth in foster care make successful transitions, the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative recommends the following policies:

To connect young people with permanent families, policymakers should:

- Mandate that all young people leaving foster care are discharged to a family, legal guardian, adoptive parent, or a permanently committed, caring adult.
- Provide subsidized legal guardianship and subsidized kinship care as options.
- Ensure that young people in foster care are placed with families, thereby reducing reliance on congregate care.
- Provide access to supports and placements that permit young people to remain in their neighborhoods and communities.
- Provide older youth with ways to safely re-engage with birth parents or relatives.
- Place siblings together; when that is not possible, policymakers should require and facilitate sibling visitation unless safety is an issue.*

To provide ready access to services and supports that are racially equitable and free of structural racism, policymakers should:

- Utilize individualized assessments that are free of bias and provided by culturally competent staff.
- Ensure that the services provided are equally accessible to all young people in foster care, regardless of their race or ethnicity.
- Collect and analyze outcome and administrative data to identify and address racial disproportionality and disparate outcomes for children and youth of color.

To provide stable education and post-secondary opportunities, policymakers should:

- Ensure that young people remain in the school in which they are enrolled at the time they are removed from their families and any time placements change; if school changes are in their best interest, young people should be enrolled immediately in a new school and their records transferred promptly.*
- Provide tuition waivers to public or private colleges (or post secondary schools) to young people formerly in care to age 24.
- Provide other supports for post-secondary education (such as books, computers, school supplies, tuition payment, Education and Training Vouchers, and housing).



To create opportunities for economic success, policymakers should:

- Make matched savings accounts (also known as IDAs-Individual Development Accounts) available to all youth currently or formerly in care from age 14 to 24 with developmentally appropriate financial literacy training and assets.
- Mandate that all youth leaving foster care receive necessary personal documents including, at a minimum, their Social Security card, a certified birth certificate or green card, and a government-issue photo ID.
- Provide early and consistent work experience with priority access to workforce programs, developmentally appropriate training and ongoing support.

To provide safe, affordable housing, policymakers should:

- Allow young people to remain in foster care up to age 21* with continued permanency planning.
- Offer a variety of living arrangements for young people age 18-21, including remaining with foster parents, kinship/guardianship placements, and independent living, and allow young people to return to foster care or a supervised living setting at any time up to age 21.

To ensure access to health care, policymakers should:

- Extend Medicaid to young people age 18-21, who aged out of foster care and provide automatic enrollment and re-enrollment.
- Ensure coordination of Medicaid beyond age 21 for those meeting adult requirements.
- Ensure that health care services are comprehensive and coordinated when young people enter foster care and throughout the period of care,* and that plans are in place to continue health care after exiting foster care.

To enable young people to shape their own futures, policymakers should:

- Require that young people lead the development of their case planning, including permanency planning and transition planning that addresses education and employment goals, and is finalized during the 90-day period immediately prior to leaving care.*
- Provide young people skills to advocate for themselves and access to competent legal counsel in matters affecting their transition to adulthood.
- Provide young people opportunities for leadership and community involvement, including opportunities for advising foster care system partners on policy and practice.
- Implement the National Youth in Transition Database to find out from young people how they are doing after leaving foster care so that policy and practice can be improved.

* These items are included in the *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008*.