



NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES

COVID-19 and Older Youth in the Child Welfare System **A Resource Guide for State Legislators**

Issue Summary: NCSL staff and child welfare experts expect many older youth in the child welfare system will experience disruptions in their lives due to social distancing measures necessary to slow the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, many older youth and young adults who have recently exited the system will contend with housing and economic instability, including those who've lost their home or income as a result of college and university closures.

Major Concerns:

- **School closures** place an additional burden on families and youth who previously relied on schools for some of their meals. In addition, many schools are continuing to provide lessons electronically, but not all youth have access to a computer or the internet.
- Some **courts are closed or operating with limited capacity**, resulting in delayed reunification and substance abuse court proceedings. In addition, older foster youth are more likely than the general population to be involved with the juvenile justice system. These crossover youth will also have to contend with delayed judicial proceedings and visitation disruptions.
- Older youth in the child welfare system with children of their own will join the legions of parents struggling to arrange safe, stable and developmentally appropriate **child care**.
- Many youth **aging out of foster care** during the pandemic will struggle to become independent and self-sufficient without the support of the child welfare system or a permanent placement.

Guidance for Legislators: During this pandemic and throughout the anticipated economic downturn, legislators will be responsible for appropriating funds, championing legislative solutions, providing oversight of child welfare agencies, and addressing constituent concerns. As always, we recommend talking with your state child welfare agency about how you can help them.

Summary of State and Federal Activity: The chart below contains federal guidance, directives and opportunities and examples of how states are addressing COVID-19's impact on vulnerable older youth and young adults. **As of April 3, no state has introduced legislation directly addressing these issues.** NCSL staff will update this information regularly, so check back often.

State Examples

Topics	Sources	Description
Housing support, aging out of care	NCSL	35 states allow for reentry into foster care up to age 21 (or up to 23 if a state exercises the option in their Title IV-E plan).
Child care access, funding	North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services	Childcare Guidance – North Carolina, like many other jurisdictions, is under a “stay at home” order to slow the spread of COVID-19. Child care centers are considered essential services and may remain open. North Carolina has

		also launched a hotline to provide child care options for children of critical workers who do not have access to typical care because of COVID-19 closures.
Meal programs	Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction	Nutrition and Meals Guidance – Schools in Washington state may continue to provide meals from closed sites. They may serve up to two “grab-n-go” meals per recipient per day.

Federal Resources

Topics	Sources	Description
Housing support	Administration for Children and Families	Jerry Milner, associate commissioner for the Administration for Children and Families, released this letter and participated in a virtual town hall addressing housing for foster care alum.
Housing support	Federal legislation	Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood – Up to 30% of a state’s or tribe’s annual allotment may be used to provide room and board assistance to eligible youth ages 18-21 (or up to 23 if that option has been exercised in the Chafee plan) On March 19, 2020, the Congressional Caucus on Foster Youth requested an increase in funding and increased flexibility in how states use the funds.
Housing support, funding	Federal legislation	On March 19, 2020, the Congressional Caucus on Foster Youth requested an increase in funding and increased flexibility in how states use the funds. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act was passed on March 27, 2020 and provides \$6.3 billion to the Administration for Children and Families, including \$45 million in grants to states for child welfare services. NCSL provides an overview of the legislation.
In-home services, health care	Federal legislation	Families First Coronavirus Response Act – Includes a temporary increase in the federal medical assistance percentage (FMAP), which provides additional funding for child welfare agencies. This includes funding for foster youth through Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. NCSL provides a summary of the legislation.
Education, housing support	Federal legislation	McKinney-Vento Act – States must have procedures to ensure that homeless children and youth do not face barriers to accessing academic and extracurricular activities.