



Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (P.L. 110-351)

On October 7, 2008, in response to the growing need for federal foster care reform, President George W. Bush signed into law the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (P.L. 110-351). Provisions in this act will greatly contribute to improving the lives of children currently in foster care by extending and enhancing previously available services. The act will also promote permanency for children waiting to be adopted and enable more children to leave foster care safely and permanently to the security of relative guardians.

Older Youth

In 2006, over 26,000 youth left foster care without the stability and safety of a permanent family.¹ Many of these youth aged out of foster care after spending on average of more **five** years in the system. These young adults went on to experience significant challenges as they transitioned to adulthood with minimal supports and no safety net. Previous research shows that youth who age-out of foster care are more likely than other young people to experience homelessness, become incarcerated, suffer from mental health disorders, poverty, and lack the life and educational skills necessary to live successful independent lives.² P.L. 110-351 includes a number of provisions intended to enhance the supports and services that are essential to the success and well-being of this vulnerable population of young people.

P.L. 110-351 Older Youth Provisions

- Allow states to extend foster care and adoption and guardianship assistance to age 21 to Title IV-E eligible youth enrolled in school, employed, in an activity promoting or removing barriers to employment, or who are unable to participate in employment or education due to a mental or physical illness.
- Mandates the development of a personal transition plan for youth aging out of foster care to begin at least 90 days prior to the youth's exit from foster care at age 18, 19, 20 or 21.

Research shows that youth who remain in care beyond their 18th birthdays fare better than those who age-out of care at 18. Youth remaining in care are more likely than youth leaving care at age 18 to attend and complete at least one year of college, earn higher wages, and receive independent living services than youth leaving care at age 18.³

In addition, youth who remain in care beyond the age of 18 are less likely to become pregnant during their late adolescence. Currently, 45 states extend foster care and 35 extend adoption beyond the age of 18. According to the Federal Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data, 74% of the number of youth in foster care at age 18 were in care at age 19, in 2006. According to Illinois researchers at the University of Chicago, more than half of their young adult population was still in care by age 21.⁴ States choosing to extend care will receive a federal match for foster care, adoption, guardianship maintenance payments and trainings for those youth equal to the foster care match. States that currently have youth in

¹ Federal AFCARS Data, 2006.

² Mark Courtney, Amy Dworsky, Gretchen Cusick, Judy Havlicek, Alfred Perez, Tom Keller, "Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 21." Chapin Hall Center for Children, University of Chicago, (December 2007): 68-70; Peter Pecora, Ronald Kessler, Jason Williams, Kirk O'Brien, Chris Downs, Diana English, James White, Eva Hiripi, Catherine White, Tamera Wiggins, & Kate Holmes, "Improving Foster Family Care: Findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study." Casey Family Programs, (2005).

<http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/NorthwestAlumniStudy.htm> (accessed August 15, 2008); M.B. Kushel, I. H. Yen, L. Gee, & M.E. Courtney, "Homelessness and Health Care Access After Emancipation: Results From the Midwest Evaluation of Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth." Archives of Pediatric Medicine 161 no. 10 (2007).

³ Mark Courtney, "The Difficult Transition to Adulthood for Foster Youth in the US: Implications for the State as a Corporate Parent." Society for Research and Child Development's Social Policy Research Report, Vol. 23, No. 1. University of Washington (January 2009)

⁴ Mark Courtney, Amy Dworsky, Gretchen Cusick, Judy Havlicek, Alfred Perez, Tom Keller, "Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 21." Chapin Hall Center for Children, University of Chicago, (December 2007): 68-70.

care who are older than 18, would greatly benefit from reinvesting saved state dollars in their welfare systems to promote permanency for youth at-risk of aging out.