



2018 SCR 10
FINAL REPORT
TASK FORCE ON EXTENDING THE AGE OF FOSTER CARE TO 21
FEBRUARY 1, 2019

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Task Force is thankful for the thoughtful and diligent leadership by its Chairwomen, Secretary Marketa Garner Walters and Senator Regina Barrow. We are grateful to Governor John Bel Edwards and First Lady Donna Edwards for their continued commitment to all children and youth in foster care in Louisiana and for making this work a priority.

The success of any Task Force relies on the members who take ownership and lead the way for productive conversation, thoughtful discussion and discerning decision making. The Task Force members worked alongside DCFS staff in numerous committees to dig deeply into the issues and best practices to make their decisions and recommendations. We offer a sincere and heartfelt thank you to Task Force members and the DCFS staff leads for their commitment to ensuring we chose the best course for our youth. We particularly want to recognize the tireless efforts of Christy Tate, whose leadership in the ever growing Transitioning Youth Section ensured youth participation in every aspect of the work and embedded youth voice in every decision we made.

This work was completed in partnership with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, whose understanding of national best practices, expertise in youth programs and fiscal modeling offered Louisiana the highest caliber of guidance and advice. We could not have accomplished this work without the Casey Foundation and its partner, Mainspring Consulting. Casey's participation ensured we stayed on course and had the right information to make the very best decisions for youth.

Secretary Walters and Assistant Secretary Dr. Rhenda Hodnett have a long and rich history of supporting youth in foster care. Their passion and commitment to achieving the very best outcomes for our youth fueled and inspired this work. Senator Barrow has been a constant, passionate voice in the state legislature, and together, they have ensured that youth in foster care in Louisiana will have the opportunities to enter adulthood with the supports and services they need to succeed.

**PANEL MEMBERS OF THE SCR 10 TASK FORCE ON
EXTENDING THE AGE OF FOSTER CARE TO 21**

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Report from the Task Force on Extending the Age of Foster Care to 21

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Task Force on Extending the Age of Foster Care to 21 (referred to herein as Task Force) was created in the 2018 Regular Session of the Louisiana Legislature to study the feasibility of extending the age of foster care to 21. This legislation was precipitated by the ending of the Young Adult Program (YAP) in 2013 and the recommendations of the 2016 HCR 94 Task Force on Youth Aging Out of Foster Care. The Task Force is led by Department of Children and Family Services Secretary Marketa Garner Walters and Senator Regina Barrow. It aims to identify the best program components to serve Louisiana youth aging out of care, while at the same time determining feasibility of those services.

Also in the 2018 Regular Session, Act 649 was passed, which provides that a child in foster care who remains a full-time high school student, or in the process of receiving an equivalent credential, may continue in foster care until their high school graduation or 21st birthday, whichever comes first. While this provision allows for young adults to complete their secondary education with continued support from the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS or the Department), this support is very time-limited and does not allow for all youth exiting foster care to receive necessary services.

DCFS views youth in foster care and those transitioning out of foster care as a priority. The Department fully supports the Extended Foster Care program and verifies the need to expand that program. The Department also realizes that while it is of the utmost importance to provide adequate services to youth transitioning out of foster care, it is equally important to work towards the reduction of children and youth entering foster care and to develop targeted efforts towards permanency for youth in care to prevent aging out. It is the hope of the Department that with these three efforts in place the number of youth that experience aging out of care will be reduced, while at the same time the program available to youth who do age out of care will meet their needs, provide safety during their transition and improve their outcomes.

II. OUTCOMES AND NEEDS OF YOUTH TURNING 18 IN FOSTER CARE

“Young people like me who age out of the system usually don’t have the luxury of having a family to help. The decisions we face every day – how we pay our bills, put food in our mouths and keep a roof over our heads – are difficult, and we have to answer them without the guidance or support of a family.” – Shantel, age 18

Research has consistently shown that youth who exit foster care at age 18 have a plethora of negative outcomes: reduced rates of completing high school, very unlikely to complete a post-secondary educational or vocational program, increased rates of homelessness, incarceration, substance abuse, unemployment and early pregnancy.

Young people who transition from foster care without the needed network of support experience very poor outcomes at a much higher rate than their peers in the general population:

- More than one in five will become homeless after age 18.¹
- Only 58 percent will graduate high school by age 19 (compared to 87 percent of all 19-year-olds).²
- Young adults at age 19, no longer in care, have higher rates of recent alcohol abuse, substance dependence and substance abuse than those still in care. This suggests much of the difference is due to recent problems experienced by 19-year-olds after leaving care.²
- 71 percent of young women are pregnant by 21, facing higher rates of unemployment, criminal conviction, public assistance and involvement in the child welfare system.³
- At the age of 24, only half are employed.⁴
- Fewer than 3 percent will earn a college degree by age 25 (compared to 28 percent of all 25-year-olds).⁵
- One in four will be involved in the justice system within two years of leaving the foster care system.⁶

These differences in outcomes result in welfare and Medicaid costs, the cost of incarceration, lost wages and other significant costs to individuals and to society. A cost avoidance study funded by the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative estimated that the outcome differences between young people transitioning from foster care and the general population cost nearly \$8 billion for each annual cohort of youth leaving care nationally.⁷

There are many reasons youth leave foster care unprepared to manage adult responsibilities:

- Insufficient Financial Support: Youth do not have adequate time and available resources to completely support themselves at such a young age.
- Unutilized Self-Sufficiency Opportunities: Many youth in foster care are kept from making daily decisions and mastering basic daily activities prior to leaving foster care.
- Inaccurate Assumptions: Youth may think there is an “adult system” to provide housing, food, transportation and case management.
- Deficient Resources: A youth’s connections to family, relatives and/or other adults does not necessarily lead to a place for the youth to live. Affordable housing options other states have created do not exist in Louisiana.
- Unmet Special Needs: Youth with developmental disabilities may age out of foster care while still on waiting lists for adult services. Youth with mental health diagnoses may go from a foster home to an adult homeless shelter where no one knows their history.

¹ Casey Family Programs. (1998). Northwest foster care alumni study. Seattle, WA.

² Courtney, M.E., and Dworsky, A. (2005). Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Outcomes at age 19. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children.

³ Pecora, P.J., Kessler, R.C., Williams, J., O’Brien, K., Downs, A.C., English, D., White, J., Hiripi, E., White, C.R., Wiggins, T., and Holmes, K. (2005). Improving family foster care: Findings from the Northwest foster care alumni study. Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs.

⁴ Pecora, P.J., et al.

⁵ Pecora, P.J., et al.

⁶ Courtney, M.E., et al. (2005).

⁷ Jim Casey Youth Opportunity Initiative (2013). *Issue Brief: Cost Avoidance The Business Case for Investing in Youth Aging Out of Foster Care*. Retrieved on January 14, 2019, from: <https://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/JCYOI-CostAvoidance-2013.pdf>

- Dependents: Former foster youth are often responsible for the care of other dependents, including biological children of their own. Parenting young adults may be expected to fend for themselves and their child without childcare, income, housing or parenting skills.
- Incomplete Brain Development:
 - Scientific studies have now been able to demonstrate that the adolescent brain development does not reach its full capacity until their mid-20s.⁸ It is at this point that the adolescent brain resembles that of an adult.⁹ A recent statement from the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry clarified that “the brain continues to mature and develop throughout childhood and adolescence and well into adulthood.”¹⁰
 - The scientific explanation of the process provides that there is a specific region of the brain called the amygdala that is responsible for immediate reactions, including fear and aggressive behavior. That region of the brain develops early. However, the prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain that controls reasoning and helps us to think before we act, develops later. Scans of the maturing brain suggest that parts of the cortex mature at different rates.⁹ Basically, the brain is still changing and maturing well into adulthood. It is the prefrontal cortex that helps us better understand one another, form judgments and control impulses and emotions. In essence, the area of brain development that supports control and planning is the last to mature. It is during this transition period that it is the most beneficial for the youth transitioning from foster care to have support and connection with meaningful and caring adults.
 - Coupling the developing brain with the enormous hormonal changes taking place during adolescence is also important to note. Reproductive hormones shape not only sex-related growth and behavior, but also social behavior. The hormone system is also involved in the brain’s response to stress and related stress hormones. These stress hormones can have complex effects on the brain and, subsequently, on behaviors.
 - Scientists have emphasized that the fact that the teen brain is in transition does not mean it is not up to par. It is different from both a child’s and an adult’s in ways that may equip youth to make the transition from dependence to independence. The capacity for learning at this age, an expanding social life and a taste for exploration and limit-testing may all, to some extent, be reflections of age-related biology. The brain research may also serve to help adults understand the importance of creating an environment in which teens can explore and experiment while helping them avoid behavior that is destructive to themselves or others.⁹ The adolescent’s brain works differently than an adult’s when they make decisions or problem-solve. Their actions are guided more by the emotional and reactive amygdala and less by the thoughtful, logical prefrontal cortex (that does not fully develop until the mid-20s).

⁸ Kotulak, Ronald. "Teens Driven to Distraction." Chicago Tribune. March 24, 2006

⁹ "The Teen Brain: Still under Construction." (2011). The National Institute of Mental Health.

¹⁰ "Teen Brain: Behavior, Problem Solving, and Decision Making", No. 95; September 2016. American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. Retrieved from: http://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/The-Teen-Brain-Behavior-Problem-Solving-and-Decision-Making-095.aspx

- According to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, adolescents are more likely to:
 - Act on impulse
 - Misread or misinterpret social cues and emotions
 - Get into accidents of all kinds⁸
 - Get involved in fights
 - Engage in dangerous or risky behavior
 Conversely, they are less likely to:
 - Think before they act
 - Pause to consider the consequences of their actions
 - Change their dangerous and inappropriate behaviors
- An awareness of these differences between the adult and adolescent brain are critical in terms of helping us understand, anticipate and manage behaviors.

Adverse Childhood Experiences

A new field of research is focused on the long-term impact of childhood trauma on a person over time. The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) studies show that traumatic events such as physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, physical neglect, emotional neglect, domestic violence, substance misuse within a household, household mental illness, parental separation or divorce and death of a key person or incarcerated household member can lead to long-term negative impacts on physical as well as mental health.¹¹ While studies show adverse childhood experiences are common in the general population (close to 70 percent), it is known that children come to the foster care system with at least one adverse child experience and are likely to have a high overall ACE score.¹²

Without intervention, ACEs can result in long-term disease, disability, chronic social problems and early death. Ninety percent of public mental health clients have been exposed to multiple physical or sexual abuse traumatic events. Importantly, intergenerational transmission which perpetuates ACEs will continue without implementation of interventions to interrupt the cycle.¹³

III. BEST PRACTICE FOR IMPROVED OUTCOMES

In contrast, research clearly demonstrates improved outcomes for young people who stay in foster care past the age of 18.¹⁴ A recent study of young adults who turned 18 in foster care in California found young people who remained in care past age 18 were more likely than those who had left care to be enrolled in school, reported having more social support and had received more supportive services. They were less likely than those who had left care to

¹¹ SAMSHA Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies. (2016). Retrieved from: <https://www.samhsa.gov/capt/practicing-effective-prevention/prevention-behavioral-health/adverse-childhood-experiences>

¹² Effects: Child abuse and neglect affect children now and later. (2016). Center for Disease Control and Prevention Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childmaltreatment/consequences.html>

¹³ Jennings, Ann. PhD. (2011). Retrieved from: www.TheAnnalInstitute.org

¹⁴ Extending Foster Care to Age 21. Clark M. Peters, Amy Dworsky, Mark E. Courtney, Harold Pollack, at http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/publications/Issue_Brief%2006_23_09.pdf

experience economic hardships, food insecurity, homelessness, psychiatric hospitalization and criminal justice system involvement.¹⁵

In addition to the positive impact extending foster care has on individual young adults' lives, there is also a compelling fiscal impact for states that extend foster care. For example, the Midwest Study of Former Foster Youth found that every \$1 that Illinois spent on extending care beyond age 18 increases by nearly \$2 the estimated lifetime earnings of foster youth.¹⁶ A Washington state study found that among the population of foster youth who graduate from high school or receive a GED, young adults in extended foster care had higher college attendance, fewer arrests and used food stamps for a shorter period of time than did graduates who did not participate. This resulted in a taxpayer benefit of \$1.35 for every dollar spent on the program. Considering benefits to both the taxpayer and participant, the Foster Care to 21 program provided \$5.16 in benefits for every dollar spent.¹⁷

Young people who remain in care past the age of 18 are also less likely to become pregnant as teens. A Chapin Hall study found that extending care to 21 is associated with a 38 percent reduction in the risk of girls in foster care becoming pregnant between 16 and 19 years old.¹⁸ Another study found that in systems where foster care has been extended to age 21, boys in foster care who become fathers are more involved with their child(ren).¹⁹ This is important because unplanned pregnancies often present major obstacles for young adults trying to establish themselves. Becoming a parent too soon may interrupt education, which negatively impacts employment and earning power. The likelihood of a young, single woman with a child or children living at or below the poverty line is far greater than for young women who have delayed pregnancy. Additionally, support is critical for parenting youth or those who are expecting. These supports will promote the health of pregnant youth and their children by ensuring timely delivery of prenatal and postnatal healthcare, will enhance parenting capacity to prevent the separation of parenting youth from their children by protecting youths' rights as parents and will support them in acquiring the skills and resources needed to care for their children. These supports will reduce negative outcomes further down the road, including homelessness, repeat pregnancy and custody loss. Much of the cost of teen childbearing is associated with negative consequences for the children of teen mothers.²⁰ "Kids Having Kids" uses a calculation of \$5,500 per child for the first 15 years of life as an estimate of the societal costs of unplanned, too-early childbearing. Using these calculations, we estimate the 3,029 birth

¹⁵ Courtney, M. E., Okpych, N. J., Charles, P., Mikell, D., Stevenson, B., Park, K., Kindle, B., Harty, J., & Feng, H. (2016). Findings from the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study (CalYOUTH): Conditions of Youth at Age 19. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

¹⁶ Courtney, M. (2015). Do the Benefits of Extending Foster Care to Age 21 Outweigh the Costs? Evidence from Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin. Retrieved on January 14, 2018, from: <https://www.purdue.edu/hhs/hdfs/fii/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/CourtneyReportChapter.pdf>

¹⁷ Mason Burley & Stephanie Lee (2010). Extending foster care to age 21: Measuring costs and benefits in Washington State. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, Document No. 10-01-3902.

¹⁸ Dworsky, A., & Courtney, M. E. (2010). The risk of teenage pregnancy among transitioning foster youth: Implications for extending state care beyond age 18. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 32, 1351-1356.

¹⁹ Hook, J. L., & Courtney, M. E. (2013). Former foster youth as fathers: Risk and protective factors predicting father-child contact. *Family Relations*, 62, 571-583.

²⁰ Hoffman S.D., Ph.D. (2006) *By the Numbers - The Public Costs of Teen Childbearing*. Washington DC: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.

difference nationally between the young people transitioning from care and the general population results in societal costs of nearly \$250 million.²¹

States that invest in extending foster care past the age of 18 can also expect to see a decrease in incarceration among youth that age out of foster care.²² In *New Evidence on the Monetary Value of Saving a High Risk Youth*, Michael Cohen estimates the cost to taxpayers of a young person who is persistently involved in the criminal justice system ranges from \$2.7 million to \$4.8 million over the course of a lifetime.²³ A small investment in young people transitioning from foster care at age 18 can yield significant savings in the criminal justice system for decades to come.

The extension of foster care to 21 would:

- Give young adults and caregivers more support during the transition to adulthood
- Prevent foster youth from becoming homeless immediately after exiting foster care
- Allow youth who left the system thinking they could manage on their own, a contingency plan when they encounter challenges
- Keep young adults connected to caregivers who know them
- Provide youth a better chance of completing high school or HiSET diploma/certificate
- Allow some youth a chance to begin a college or trade program
- Give youth a chance to gain employment experience and/or improve their employment situation to earn more income
- Increase time to find an adequate living arrangement for young adults in transition
- Provide more time to establish permanent connections
- Give caregivers more time to connect young adults with other systems such as the adult mental health system or developmental disabilities system
- Give youth with dependents a support system to become better caregivers themselves

Since the passage of the Fostering Connections Act in 2008, 28 states have taken advantage of new federal funding to extend supports and services for young people between the ages of 18 and 21 through their Title IV-E foster care program.²⁴ The recently enacted Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) provides further opportunities for state leaders to support older youth who have experienced foster care by expanding eligibility of Chafee²⁵ services up to

²¹ Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative (2013).

²² Henzel, P.D., Mayfield, J., Soriano, A., Marshall, D., & Felver, B.E.M. (2016). Youth Aging Out of Foster Care: Risk and Protective Factors for Criminal Justice System Involvement. Washington State Department of Social and Health Services. RDA Report 7.109. Retrieved on January 14, 2019, from: http://sac.ofm.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/pdf/foster_youth_report.pdf

²³ Cohen M. & Piquero A. (2007) *New Evidence on the Monetary Value of Saving a High Risk Youth*. Springer Science+Business Media, LLC

²⁴ Juvenile Law Center. "Extended Foster Care." *Juvenile Law Center*, 30 May 2018, <https://jlc.org/issues/extended-foster-care>. Accessed on 1 November 2018.

²⁵ The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program offers grant funds to states and tribes for services that help current and former foster youth achieve self-sufficiency and transition to adulthood.

the age of 23 for states that have already extended their Title IV-E foster care program and Education and Training Vouchers (ETVs) for young adults up to age 26 for all states.

IV. TRANSITIONING YOUTH EFFORTS IN LOUISIANA

Prior to 2013, Louisiana provided ongoing financial assistance and case management for youth who aged out of foster care at 18 who were pursuing secondary or post-secondary education through the Young Adult Program (YAP). When YAP ended in July 2013 due to budget cuts, very limited support was available to youth who aged out of foster care through the Department's contracted Independent Living providers using federal Chafee funds.

In 2016, DCFS established older youth transitioning from foster care as a main priority. Assessment determined that Louisiana was in a difficult place with minimal services available to support this population of youth. A threefold vision was developed for Louisiana to better serve the youth aging out of foster care:

- Reduce the number of children and youth who enter foster care;
- Develop targeted efforts toward permanency for youth in care to prevent aging out; and
- Develop an extended foster care program to support youth who do age out.

The following strategies were utilized to achieve the vision:

1. Staffing and re-structuring

The Department realigned its existing limited resources to create a State Office team to lead the effort and develop a transitioning youth program. The program was designed to provide direct support, hands-on guidance and specialized services to support youth in and transitioning out of foster care. Furthermore, existing case managers were developed into specialized youth workers to provide case management services specific to this population.

2. Training to target permanency and partnership

Specialized training was held for the Department's youth consultants and specialized youth workers. The Department partnered with Casey Family Programs to provide training through Plummer Youth Promise regarding Family Search and Engagement, Youth-Guided Teaming and Permanency Readiness. The partnership with Plummer continues for staff to receive hands-on guidance to further develop skills and knowledge in these three areas.

3. Partnerships to serve youth

The Department has adopted the Open Table model to serve youth aging out of foster care. Open Table was piloted in the Monroe and Baton Rouge regions to learn best practices to implementation. Open Table has expanded across the state to multiple areas, including Covington, New Orleans, Shreveport and Alexandria, through community partnerships. Benefits to Open Table include increased partnership opportunities for community and government, the opportunity for a youth to connect and form relationships with multiple people and a continued connection to support youth once the table concludes.

Opportunities for youth involvement and voice have been increased by ensuring more youth involvement and voice in all aspects of the Department's work. Through partnership with Louisiana Institute for Children in Families, youth who aged out of foster care are provided opportunities for a legislative internship each year. For the past 6 years, youth with foster care experience have been employed by all DCFS contracted Independent Living providers.

Due to the 2016 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the partnership between the Department and the Louisiana Department of Education (DOE) has strengthened. The strength of this collaborative relationship has had several positive impacts on the potential educational outcomes for youth in foster care. It has increased technical assistance to both local school system staff and DCFS case workers to insure they are knowledgeable of the educational rights afforded to youth in foster care under ESSA. In addition, the collaboration between DCFS and DOE has provided a clear path for timely resolution of educational stability barriers that may exist for the expanded population of youth in foster care.

4. Adoption of models that demonstrate success

With the passage of Act 649, Louisiana extended foster care to youth aging out who are enrolled in a secondary educational program. DCFS developed the Extended Foster Care (EFC) program and has studied best program practices with multiple partners and stakeholders including the Annie E. Casey Foundation. As part of this research, the Department found the YVLifeSet program through Youth Villages to be the only model of case management for 17- to 21-year-olds to show improved outcomes. The Department has elected to utilize YVLifeSet as the case management model for extended foster care cases. Louisiana is the first state to use this model with state employees as the YVLifeSet specialists.

Independent Living (IL) services have been restructured to be more individualized, experiential and in the home with the youth and caregivers. This model focuses on learning IL skills through daily life activities. The IL service array also includes more robust youth engagement programs.

v. PARTNERSHIP WITH ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

DCFS has partnered with the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Child Welfare Strategy Group (CWSG) to conduct a thorough assessment and analysis of permanency for older youth. The assessment also fulfilled a request to begin analyzing and addressing race equity within the child welfare system. This work is ongoing as Annie E. Casey supports the Department's efforts in building and restructuring programs to serve youth.

The work efforts below identify the current partnerships to support the work of the EFC program to implement a robust and effective program in Louisiana and proactively address the provisions of the new Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA). CWSG and DCFS are committed to improving outcomes for older youth in Louisiana.

1. Extended Foster Care (EFC) Workgroup
 - a. Assists in implementation of the current EFC program that was recently passed into law on June 1, 2018.
 - b. Focuses on the identification of best program practices for extended foster care and makes recommendations on the design of an effective EFC program that

- promotes legal permanence and/or increases positive outcomes for youth who age out.
 - c. Conducts a fiscal analysis of the EFC program recommendations.
- 2. Management of Group Care (MGC) Workgroup
 - a. Focuses on increasing permanency for older youth through reduced use of group care by developing an approval process that prevents inappropriate group home placement, a structured teaming process to help youth safely step down from group care and enter family-based settings, and additional placement resources, including kinship care.
- 3. Home Development (HD) Workgroup
 - a. Focuses on the development and enhancement of existing resources to promote placement stability and improve services/support to foster and kin caregivers, i.e. Kinship Navigator Program.
 - b. Focuses on the development of resources through research of best practices to support placements for youth exiting group home placement and youth participating in the EFC program.
- 4. Enhanced Use of Data (EUD) Workgroup
 - a. Utilizes a performance outcome focus to monitor and evaluate progress of young adults in the EFC program.
- 5. Family and Youth Engagement (FYE) Workgroup
 - a. Incorporates youth and family voice and involvement into principles, policies and practices to promote permanency.
 - b. Prepares youth to meaningfully participate in team meetings to support placement stability.
- 6. Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) Workgroup
 - a. Conducts a fiscal, program and policy analysis and readiness assessment of FFPSA's opportunities and challenges to determine next steps and develop an implementation plan of action.

VI. TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

The EFC Workgroup, supported by Annie E. Casey and Mainspring Consulting, composed recommendations for the best program practices within an extended foster care program. These recommendations were developed by reviewing national best practices, federal guidelines and criteria, and gathering input from young adults and stakeholders. Recommendations of the EFC Workgroup were adopted by the Task Force.

Building on the success of the current EFC program, DCFS requested that Mainspring Consulting, with support from the Annie E Casey Strategic Consulting Group, additionally assess the fiscal implications of expanding eligibility for the EFC program. The work included the following key steps:

1. Facilitate planning conversations among key stakeholders to reach agreement on what expanded eligibility would look like in terms of case management, placement settings and supportive services;

2. Map current investments in EFC and other programs currently serving youth in and transitioning from foster care with an eye toward identifying opportunities to use state and federal funds more efficiently;
3. Develop cost estimates of expanding Title IV-E eligibility based on design considerations; and
4. Develop projections of the net fiscal impact of expanding the EFC program based on the cost assumptions, potential state savings and expected Title IV-E revenue.

Design of Extended Foster Care

The first step in producing a sound fiscal analysis of extended foster care in Louisiana was to develop a clear set of agreed-upon design assumptions for the program. Working diligently, the EFC Workgroup ensured that their program recommendations were developmentally appropriate, geared to promote permanency, youth-directed, informed by brain-development research and designed to promote racial equity. The Workgroup made recommendations related to eligibility, case management, placement settings and judicial oversight.

Eligibility: Federal Requirements and State Examples

To receive federal reimbursement through the Title IV-E program, participants must:

- Have attained the age of 18 but not yet be 21;
- Be in the custody of a public children services agency upon attaining the age of 18; and
- Meet at least one of the following criteria:
 - Be completing **secondary education** or a program leading to an equivalent credential;
 - Be enrolled in an institution that provides **post-secondary or vocational education**;
 - Be participating in a program or activity designed to **promote or remove barriers to employment**;
 - Be **employed for at least 80 hours per month**;
 - Be incapable of doing any of the activities described above due to a **medical condition**.

Under federal regulations, states also have options related to eligibility for an extended foster care program. States have the option to allow young people to leave and return to care and to receive the same supports and services as those provided to young people who remained in care continuously.

The majority of states that have extended Title IV-E foster care programs have **fully extended eligibility to age 21 and for all five eligibility criteria**.

Most states also utilize a **Voluntary Placement Agreement (VPA)** as the administrative mechanism to extend eligibility beyond the age of 18. A VPA is a written agreement between a child welfare agency and young person that details terms of the relationship, including the expectation that the young adult will continue to meet eligibility requirements and the responsibilities of the agency to provide room and board, case management and other supportive services. Use of a VPA offers several advantages. First, it provides a developmentally appropriate approach for supporting young people, in which the young person

decides whether to stay in (or re-enter) care. Second, states are able to re-determine Title IV-E eligibility based on the young person's income – not their family of origin's income – which generally results in higher Title IV-E penetration rates for this population, particularly when that determination occurs at age 18. Federal requirements are also more flexible with case review requirements when a VPA is issued. Connecticut, Hawaii, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Carolina, North Dakota, Texas and West Virginia all use VPAs.

Most states allow young people to **exit and re-enter care** with few restrictions. Of the 28 states that have Title IV-E approved extended foster care programs, only one does not have a provision for re-entry.

Eligibility Recommendations

Based on their review of best practices and ensuring that their recommendations were developmentally appropriate, geared to promote permanency, youth-directed, informed by brain-development research and designed to promote racial equity, the EFC Workgroup recommended:

- Any young person who is adjudicated **in care on the last day of their 17th year and meets at least one of the Fostering Connections federal requirements** is eligible to remain in foster care until their 21st birthday. The Fostering Connections requirements include:
 - Completing secondary education or in a program leading to an equivalent credential;
 - Enrolled in an institution that provides post-secondary or vocational education;
 - Participating in a program or activity designed to promote, or remove barriers, to employment;
 - Employed for at least 80 hours per month; or
 - Have a medical condition that renders the young person incapable of engaging in any of these activities.
- All young people who aged out of foster care and are between the ages of 18 and 21 have access to the EFC program.
- Young people will have **the choice to opt-in to foster care at age 18 under a voluntary placement agreement (VPA)**. Young people who choose to remain in foster care past age 18 will have the choice to opt-out of extended foster care anytime thereafter.
- If a young person chooses to opt-out of extended foster care on their 18th birthday or anytime thereafter, **the young person will be allowed to re-enter care at any point prior to their 21st birthday**.
- Young people who choose to leave foster care will **continue to have access to Louisiana's array of aftercare services at the same level they are currently provided**.

Case Management: Federal Requirements and State Examples

The federal requirements for case management for young people over the age of 18 are largely the same as for those youth who are in care up to age 18. Each young person must have a caseworker who has a face-to-face meeting with that young person at least once per month. Additionally, Fostering Connections requires that all young people have a transition plan. Child welfare agencies remain responsible to work toward a permanency plan for young adults ages 18 and older. However, if young adults entered through a VPA, agencies are not required to

obtain a judicial determination for reasonable efforts to finalize a permanency plan every 12 months, as they are with youth up to age 18. Although not a federal requirement, effective practice would continue a focus on permanency for older youth.

A developmental approach to case management recognizes young people's continued brain development, the appropriate role of risk-taking and the importance of supportive adult relationships. Effective case management is also trauma-informed and youth-centered. States with strong case management approaches for young adults recognize that working with young adults often requires *more* time than a child under 18 and balances caseloads appropriately; allow case managers to work flexibly to be responsive to young adults' needs after normal business hours or on weekends; provide access to a pot of funds to support young adults in emergencies; and continue to emphasize permanency in all aspects of their work.

Case Management Recommendations

Based on their review of best practices and ensuring that their recommendations were developmentally appropriate, geared to promote permanency, youth-directed, informed by brain-development research and designed to promote racial equity, the EFC Workgroup recommended:

Dedicated public case managers will provide case management services beginning at age 17 ½. Transitioning young adults to dedicated case managers before their 18th birthday will hopefully boost uptake rates in the EFC program and ensure young adults receive intensive specialized services for at least six months before launching to independence.

- Case managers will utilize the Youth Villages LifeSet model. The YVLifeSet model is an evidence-based intervention that utilizes small caseloads to ensure high-intensity service provision, including a minimum of one face-to-face session per week. The YVLifeSet model provides extensive training to ensure case managers can help youth achieve their education, employment, housing, permanency and independent living skills. In an effort to move youth toward self-sustainability, following the provision of intensive services, DCFS will continue to work with youth through a gradually less-intensive model until case closure.
- Consistent with the YVLifeSet model, the **caseload ratio will be 1:10**.

Placement Settings: Federal Requirements and State Examples

Under Fostering Connections, states can receive Title IV-E reimbursement for expenses related to placement costs for IV-E eligible youth up to age 21. Placement options for young people over the age of 18 include traditional settings such as foster homes, relative homes and group care settings. Fostering Connections also created a new category of placement called "supervised settings in which the individual is living independently." States have broad discretion in defining a supervised setting. Additionally, Title IV-E maintenance payments can be made directly to young people in Supervised Independent Living (SIL) settings.

Even with the significant flexibility offered in federal regulations, most states offer the same placement options for young people over 18 as they provided for young people under age 18: family foster homes, relative foster homes, group care and residential treatment centers. With

the passage of the FFPSA, Title IV-E reimbursement for group care is significantly restricted, and states will not be able claim IV-E funds for group care placements longer than two weeks, unless there is a well-documented need for residential treatment. As a result, a dramatic decline in the use of group homes for young adults in extended foster care is expected. There is opportunity to create more innovative and appropriate placement options through the use of SILs. Most states offer SIL settings as placement options, such as supervised and semi-supervised apartments, college dormitories, relative homes, shared housing, host homes and direct stipends. However, the particular mix of SIL placements and availability of these options vary widely across states.

In most states, the majority of young adults continue to reside in family-based settings. On average, nearly 25 percent of young people remain in either group care or residential care. The percentage of young people in SILs varies widely, which is likely attributable to each state's capacity to develop these options. Many states offer direct stipends to young people with varying degrees of usage and at varying rates. For example, Nebraska utilizes direct stipends for all young people in extended care.

Placement Recommendations

Based on their review of best practices and ensuring that their recommendations were developmentally appropriate, geared to promote permanency, youth-directed, informed by brain-development research and designed to promote racial equity, the EFC Workgroup recommended:

- Placement settings available to young people ages 18-21 will reflect a **continuation of the current pool of placement resources**. These settings include traditional and therapeutic foster care, relative foster care, group care and supervised independent living settings.
- To support their growing independence and responsibility, young people also will be able to receive **direct stipends** to cover their living expenses directly. The amount of direct stipend should be increased to \$1,063.75 per month.
- Use of group homes, beyond two-week emergency shelters, will be eliminated for young adults in the EFC program by 2021.
- Young adults in EFC will not remain in psychiatric facilities beyond when medically necessary.

Case Review: Federal Requirements and State Examples

Under Fostering Connections, the same case review requirements for young people in extended care are in place as for youth under 18 and receiving a Title IV-E payment. This includes periodic case reviews (every 6 months) by either the court or an administrative panel. For states that opt to use a VPA, a judicial finding that remaining in care is in the best interest of the young adult is required within 180 days of the signing of a VPA.

In designing case review processes, many states have built on existing approaches to foster care review that are familiar to agency staff and court personnel. It is worth noting, however, that young adults have different needs and greater abilities to participate than children under 18. Like other design aspects of extended care, review processes must be developmentally appropriate: young people should be actively engaged in the review process; reviewers should give deference to their views and their preferences regarding plan content, services and placement; and young people should be allowed to assume increasing responsibilities for their lives as they approach adulthood.²⁶ The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative identified three core principles to guide jurisdictions in designing and implementing review processes for young adults:

- Reviews should be conducted in venues that are youth/young adult friendly.
- Young people should be fully prepared for the oversight and review process and supported in meaningfully participating.
- The review process should provide context-appropriate advocacy for youth and young adults that includes support for their full involvement in the review proceedings and advocacy for achievement of case goals and resolution of other issues.²⁷

In Michigan, an administrative body outside the court system exclusively holds periodic reviews. Several states are also designing creative ways to ensure that young adults feel supported during the review process. In Tennessee, specialized Foster Care Review Boards use peer advocates – young adults who were in foster care and received post-custody supports – to consult with those currently in care about options for support, help young people communicate their preferences to the Board, and help the Boards assess and address systemic issues for improving the independent living program.

Case Review Recommendations

Based on their review of best practices and ensuring that their recommendations were developmentally appropriate, geared to promote permanency, youth-directed, informed by brain-development research and designed to promote racial equity, the EFC Workgroup recommended:

- Young adults in EFC should have an **administrative review twice annually**. Administrative review board members will have an interest in and experience working with young adults and will receive specialized training to ensure reviews are supportive, youth-directed and developmentally appropriate.
- **Peer mentors will be provided** to support young adults as they prepare for and during the case review process.
- An expansion of **court jurisdiction** will be needed for the limited purpose of making a best interest determination for extended foster care participation.

²⁶ Berkeley, K., Pokempner, J. & Shokoff, A. (2013). Success Beyond 18: Re-examining the Foster Care Review Process: Extended Foster Care as a Catalyst for Improved Practices and Better Outcomes. Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. Retrieved November 1, 2018, from: <https://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/JCYOI-SuccessBeyond18-ReExaminingtheFosterCare-2013.pdf>.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

Potential Sources of Revenue - Current Spending on Young People Currently in and Transitioning from Foster Care

Louisiana currently makes significant investments in supports and services for older youth in and transitioning from foster care. This analysis only considered investments in the existing EFC program, which supports the maintenance, housing and case management functions for young adults finishing their secondary education. Currently, the state of Louisiana has allocated \$1 million in state general funds to support this population.

The analysis assumes that Louisiana's array of aftercare services for young people who choose not to opt-in to extended foster care, which are primarily funded through Chafee and Educational and Training Vouchers (ETVs), will continue at the same level at which they are currently provided. As such, funding for those aftercare services was not considered as potential sources of revenue in this analysis.

Louisiana also was recently awarded a \$3 million, three-year competitive grant (\$1 million annually) from Youth Villages to implement the YVLifeSet case management model.

In total, Louisiana currently has **\$2 million in existing annual revenue** to apply to the expansion of the EFC program.

Projections of the Net Fiscal Impact of Extending Title IV-E Eligibility to Age 21

Based on the design work of the EFC Workgroup and the review of current state spending on young people ages 18 to 21, Mainspring Consulting worked with DCFS staff to develop cost projections and determine the net fiscal impact of expanding eligibility of extended foster care, adoption assistance and guardianship assistance.

Mainspring worked with DCFS staff to gather trend data to project the number of young people accessing these supports and the distribution of those youth across placement types. Based on that data, detailed cost assumptions were developed related to placement and case management costs. These data were used to estimate the net fiscal impact to Louisiana, taking into account existing state spending, grant funds, as well as projected new federal revenue, over the next three years.

Extending Foster Care to 21

Based on the design considerations created by the EFC Workgroup, Mainspring used the following assumptions to calculate the core costs of extending foster care:

Core Cost Assumptions

Uptake Rates	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Louisiana has experienced a downward trend in the number of young people aging out of foster care at age 18. That trend is expected to continue.• Of those young people who are eligible to remain in extended foster care:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ 76.4% of 18-year-olds will opt to remain in care○ 56.4% of 19-year-olds will opt to remain in care○ 26.4% of 20-year-olds will opt to remain in care
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Case Management and Administrative Review Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caseload ratio of 1:10 • Salary and benefits of the case managers, supervisors, regional child welfare services assistants, child welfare consultant, administrative review coordinator and peer mentors • Includes an annual 3% wage increase
Placement Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certified relative and family foster care: \$501 per month • Level I therapeutic foster care: \$2,595 per month • Level II therapeutic foster care: \$3,668 per month • Level I group home: \$4,453 per month • Level II group care: \$5,900 per month • Supervised apartments: \$3,840 per month • Intermediate care facility: Medicaid funded • Direct stipend: \$1,063.75 per month • Host home: \$501 per month • Emergency shelter: \$4,453 per month

General Revenue Assumptions

In addition to calculating the costs of extending foster care to 21, Mainspring also considered available revenue to determine the net fiscal impact. The primary revenues included new estimated Title IV-E revenue as a result of the Fostering Connections Act and as described earlier and current state spending for Extended Youth Support Services.

Sources of Existing Revenue	
SFY18 General Fund allocation for Extended Foster Care	\$1,000,000
Youth Villages annual grant to support implementation of the LifeSet model	\$1,000,000
New IV-E Revenue	Varies from year-to-year ²⁸

Costs for the EFC program, based on these assumptions, begin at \$8.1 million in 2020 and decrease to approximately \$6.1 million by 2022. The decrease is mostly attributable to eliminating the use of group care for young adults, but is also related to steady declines in the total number of young adults expected to age out of care annually. As the table below shows, extending eligibility for extended foster care leverages approximately \$3 million in new federal dollars annually for Louisiana.

²⁸ The Fostering Connections Program Instructions allow states to re-determine a young person's Title IV-E eligibility based on their own income, as opposed to their parent's income. For the purposes of this analysis, Mainspring used the IV-E penetration rate of 77.64%, which is higher than Louisiana's historical rate but still a conservative estimate given the determination is made using the young person's income.

Fiscal Impact of Expanding Eligibility for Extended Foster Care

	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022
Estimated Costs	\$8,069,501	\$6,820,985	\$6,679,909
Estimated Revenues			
New Title IV-E	\$3,072,816	\$2,838,837	\$2,772,857
Existing State General Fund allocation	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000
Youth Villages LifeSet grant	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000
Total Revenues	\$5,072,816	\$4,838,837	\$4,772,857
Net Fiscal Impact for DCFS	\$2,996,685	\$1,982,148	\$1,907,052

Extending Adoption Assistance

As a requirement of receiving federal funding for an extended foster care program, states must also offer extended adoption subsidies for youth meeting extended foster care criteria. Since 2012, an average of thirteen 16- and 17-year-olds have been adopted from foster care annually. The average adoption subsidy was \$403.39 per month.²⁹ In addition, Louisiana expects that two 18-year-olds, two 19-year-olds and two 20-year-olds will achieve adoption annually who are eligible for adoption assistance. Net state costs to extend adoption assistance are approximately \$110,000 in 2020 and grow to \$124,000 in 2022.

Fiscal Impact of Extending Adoption Assistance

	2020	2021	2022
Estimated Cost	\$227,512	\$275,919	\$256,556
Estimated Annual Title IV-Revenue	\$117,212	\$117,212	\$117,212
Net State Fiscal Impact	\$110,300	\$133,768	\$124,381

²⁹ Costs include no projected increase in subsidy levels annually.

Extending Guardianship Assistance

As a requirement of receiving federal funding for an extended foster care program, states must also offer extended guardianship subsidies for youth meeting extended foster care criteria. Since 2012, an average of one 16- and one 17-year-old have exited foster care to a subsidized guardianship annually. The average guardianship subsidy was \$382.10 per month.³⁰ Net state costs to extend guardianship assistance are approximately \$20,000 in 2020 and grow to \$38,000 in 2022.

Fiscal Impact of Extending Guardianship Assistance

	2020	2021	2022
Estimated Cost	\$36,682	\$59,608	\$68,778
Estimated Annual Title IV-Revenue	\$16,471	\$26,765	\$30,883
Net State Fiscal Impact	\$20,211	\$32,843	\$37,895

Projecting the Net Impact of Extending Eligibility Across All Three Title IV-E Programs

Based on the cost revenue assumptions developed by the Task Force, EFC Workgroup and DCFS leadership, Mainspring produced a net fiscal impact calculation of extending eligibility for all three Title IV-E programs: foster care maintenance, adoption assistance and guardianship assistance. The attached tables summarize the costs and revenues associated with a comprehensive approach to extending IV-E eligibility across program areas. In 2020, with current state investment held constant, this analysis shows a net cost of approximately \$3.1 million.

³⁰ Costs include no projected increase in subsidy levels annually.

SUMMARY OF FISCAL ANALYSIS - LOUISIANA EXTENDED FOSTER CARE

Programs	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022
Extending Adoption Assistance to 21 for Those Adopted Age 16+ Beginning in 2019			
Estimated Total Costs	\$227,512	\$275,919	\$256,556
Estimated Annual Title IV-E Revenue	\$117,212	\$142,151	\$132,175
STATE COST	\$110,300	\$133,768	\$124,381
Extending Guardianship Assistance to 21 for Guardianships 16+ Beginning in 2019			
Estimated Total Costs	\$36,682	\$59,608	\$68,778
Estimated Annual Title IV-E Revenue	\$16,471	\$26,765	\$30,883
GUARDIANSHIP STATE COST	\$20,211	\$32,843	\$37,895
DCFS Voluntary Care to 21 Costs			
Total Case Management Costs	\$2,546,208	\$2,606,630	\$2,668,940
Total Placement Costs	\$5,279,412	\$3,963,158	\$3,752,236
Total Administrative Review Costs	\$243,881	\$251,197	\$258,733
TOTAL COSTS	\$8,069,501	\$6,820,985	\$6,679,910
Estimated Annual Title IV-E Revenue	\$3,072,816	\$2,838,837	\$2,772,857
Other Revenue Sources (Youth Villages 3 year grant)	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000
VOLUNTARY CARE TO 21 STATE COST	\$3,996,685	\$2,982,148	\$2,907,053
TOTAL DCFS COST	\$4,127,196	\$3,148,759	\$3,069,329
Current State Appropriation	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000
TOTAL NEW DCFS COST	\$3,127,196	\$2,148,759	\$2,069,329

VII. LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

New legislation will be necessary to allow DCFS to adopt the recommendations of the Task Force. Legislation must address the eligibility criteria for the EFC program to allow DCFS to serve the four additional populations of youth aging out of foster care that are eligible under federal criteria. Specifically, any youth who is adjudicated as a child in need of care prior to their 18th birthday, who is in the custody of the Department on the day prior to their 18th birthday and who meets the Fostering Connections federal requirements is eligible to remain in foster care until their 21st birthday. The four additional populations of youth that should be added to current legislation are those who are:

- Enrolled in an institution that provides post-secondary or vocational education;
- Participating in a program or activity designed to promote, or remove barriers, to employment;
- Employed for at least 80 hours per month; or
- Medically incapable of engaging in any of these activities.

The EFC program is a voluntary program and allows youth to receive services under a voluntary placement agreement (VPA). Youth may choose to leave the program at any time and may also choose to re-enter at any point prior to their 18th birthday, if they opted-out on their 18th birthday or anytime thereafter.

Additionally, legislation will be needed to address court jurisdiction regarding a best interest finding which will allow DCFS to come into compliance with federal criteria. Without this legislation, DCFS is at risk of being prohibited from drawing down federal funding for the existing EFC program as well as for programming created by the new legislation. Within a designated timeframe after the VPA is signed, the Department shall file with the court a written report that shall contain information pertaining to the youth. The court will have the jurisdiction to review the VPA signed by the Department and the youth. Upon the filing of the report, the court shall open a young adult voluntary extended foster care case for the purpose of determining whether continuing in voluntary foster care is in the youth's best interests. The court shall then make that determination within the required timeframe. Following the court's determination of whether it is in the youth's best interest to continue in voluntary extended foster care, the court shall close the young adult voluntary extended foster care case, and the Department shall provide extended foster care services to the youth in accordance with the criteria of the program.

The Department shall conduct periodic administrative case reviews not less than once every 180 days to address the status of the youth's safety, continuing necessity and appropriateness of placement, extent of compliance with the case plan and projected date by which the youth may no longer require extended foster care services.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Louisiana has a responsibility to continue supporting vulnerable youth who age out of the foster care system. With the passage of the Fostering Connections Act, Louisiana has an important opportunity to improve outcomes for older youth in foster care. Act 649 and SCR 10 of the 2018

Regular Session showed Louisiana's commitment to supporting youth exiting foster care and studying the best program components to provide continued support. This report is intended to support state leaders in considering how best to provide supports and services to this particularly vulnerable population and the costs and revenues associated with various programmatic assumptions.