

April 21, 2016

Budget Advocacy Needed Now

Urge Legislators to Support Foster Care in the State Budget

All young people face barriers to independence as they move into adulthood, whether in the foster care system or not, but when young people leave foster care, many have not had the kind of experiences and successes that will help in their transition. Independently navigating the world of adulthood including finding a place to live, paying bills, understanding banking and credit, understanding medical care and health insurance, trying to finish high school or learning the college application process are all daunting, particularly without a safety net of family or other supportive adults. Many young people in care fail to graduate from high school due to a lack of programming that addresses their specific educational needs, and current levels of support for post-secondary options are inadequate to meet the need, despite additional federal and philanthropic investment over the last few years.

There are risks and opportunities to improve the circumstances of foster youth in the current budget process, and legislators need to understand that they must better support this population.

#1: Support Statewide MYOI Expansion

Opportunity: The Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative (MYOI) serves young people, ages 14-21, currently or formerly in foster care. There are sites in 63 counties in Michigan that all include the Opportunity Passport™ that includes financial literacy, life skills and other training as well as savings accounts (Individual Development Accounts) where youth must put some money aside every month and savings of up to \$1,000/year are matched. MYOI includes community partners, engages young people in leadership and leverages corporate contributions and philanthropic support.

Current Situation: The Governor and Appropriations Subcommittees in the House included additional funding for MYOI in their budget proposals to expand this critical program statewide, so that all youth in care can access the supports, regardless of where they were born or where they live. The Senate failed to include this increase.

ACTION NEEDED: Call your state Senators and let them know that it is essential that every young person in foster care be able to access services like MYOI, and that it isn't acceptable for any youth to be left out. Tell them to fix this mistake in the Department of Health and Human Services budget before it is passed out of the Senate.

#2: Continue Funding College Scholarships

Risk: The Fostering Futures Scholarship (FFS) also plays a critical role in helping young people currently or formerly in foster care by supporting their tuition, room and board, and supplies at most public universities and community colleges in Michigan.

Current Situation: The Governor and the Appropriations Subcommittees in the Senate maintained the \$750,000 in funding for this program in their budget proposals, but the House cut the scholarship funding entirely.

ACTION NEEDED: Call your state Representatives and let them know that it is unacceptable to remove this crucial benefit for young people in foster care. Tell them to fix this mistake in the Department of Health and Human Services budget before it is passed out of the House.

#3: Use At-Risk Expansion to Support Foster Care Success

Opportunity. Section 31a of the State School Aid act provides funding to support children and youth that face educational challenges, and there is broad support for increases in that program, referred to as “At-Risk” funding.

Current Situation: The Governor, House and Senate have all recommended significant increases in At-Risk funding. However, none have recommended that any of this funding be targeted to educational strategies specific to the building success of children and youth in foster care, including better trauma-informed practice; immediate access to social-emotional learning and behavioral health supports; and competency-based promotion and credit accumulation.

ACTION NEEDED: Contact your state Senator and Representative and let them know that \$5 million of any increase in Section 31a of the State School Aid Act should be devoted to educational strategies designed to assist children and youth in foster care.

There is still time to make sure that all of these items make it into the final state budget, but because the budget process moves quickly and decisions are often made by a small number of legislators without a lot of public input, we have to act quickly. At this point in the process:

1. The Governor and Appropriations Subcommittees in both the House and Senate have released their budget recommendations. In the next few weeks, we expect each chamber to finalize their recommendations by passing them through their full Appropriations Committees and then get them voted on by the full House or Senate. **Amendments to the proposed budgets can be offered by any Legislator during the full Appropriations Committee meetings or on the floor of the House and Senate when they are being debated and voted on.**
2. Once they are passed through both chambers, the differences in the proposals are ironed out through a budget Conference Committee that includes members of the House and Senate. Changes can be offered by Conference Committee members during this process, but **Legislators not on these very small committees would need to get the support of their colleagues** for changes at that point.
3. Once the Legislature agrees and passes the final budget, it must be signed by the Governor who can make changes as well, but only changes that remove funding not add it.

Your voice matters. Use it!

[Contact your state Senator and Representatives today.](#)

[Take a look at more budget resources from Michigan’s Children.](#)

If you have any questions, please contact Michele Corey at michele@michiganschildren.org.