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More Youth Able To Succeed: Increasing Public and Private Support for MYOI and Beyond

All young people face barriers to independence as they move into adulthood, whether in the foster care system or not. Studies show that most young adults are financially dependent on their parents until their late 20's. When young people leave foster care, many have not had the kind of experiences and successes that will help in their transition. Some have no one to help, resulting in discouraging outcomes including more homelessness, early parenting and involvement in the justice system than their peers, and fewer high school and college graduates. In order to be the best parents we can be to the young people in our care, Michigan needs to remove arbitrary age limits, and instead design programs that can build educational and life success for more young people currently or formerly in the foster care system.

There has been increased service availability to young people currently or formerly in foster care before and beyond age 18 due in large part to additional federal and philanthropic investment over the last few years. Despite this, young people who still need system support, whether or not they choose to receive it, are falling through the cracks at this transition causing unnecessary gaps in services available to them, including timely support for housing and other basic assistance. 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.

The Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative (MYOI) is in place to help, serving young people, ages 14-21, currently or formerly in foster care. There are sites in 63 counties in Michigan that all include:

1. Public and private funding, engaging philanthropy as well as local businesses.
2. 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.
3. Community partner boards of businesses, public and private agencies and others who provide support, discounts to services and advocacy for older youth in care.
4. Youth boards where youth are trained in leadership, media and communication skills, including how to strategically share their story and present on panels in order to help others understand the needs challenges they face.

The Governor proposed expanding MYOI to every county in the state. This expansion is needed to be able to offer MYOI services to all older youth currently or formerly in care, no matter where they live.

Recommendations:

1. Maintain the Governor's recommendation to expand the Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative.
2. MYOI can't do it alone. Michigan needs to carry our fair share of public investments in addition to those made by the federal government and private philanthropy. We need to move toward providing consistent education, mental health, housing and job supports for all youth transitioning out of foster care made available no matter where they were born or where they were raised.