



Public policy
in the best interest
of children

Contact: Matt Gillard
(517) 488-9129 (cell)

Immediate Release

Michigan Has Lowest Rate in the Country for Helping Youth Transition Out of the Foster Care, According to National Report

LANSING, MI – A new national report indicates Michigan has far to go to move youths out of the state's foster care system and into a life of self-sufficiency and life success. *Foster Youth Transitions*, released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, found that Michigan ranks last in the nation for providing education assistance to youth transitioning out of foster care and is similarly positioned in the bottom among states for providing vocational training for youths aging out of foster care.

The first-of-its-kind national report found that Michigan youths had the lowest rate in the country for receiving post-secondary scholarships to help them move into college with just one percent of youths in the 14-21 year old age category receiving college support here. The report compared data across the 50 states, and also found that just 3 percent of Michigan youth in foster care received support through an employment or vocational training.

In comparison, the national average for transitioning youth receiving educational assistance was 23 percent; on the top end, 70 percent of West Virginia's transitioning youth received scholarships. For vocational training, the national average was also 23 percent with New York providing 97 percent of its transitioning youth with vocational training.

Researchers counted 4,137 youths in the transitioning age group in Michigan which represents about a quarter of children and youth in foster care, or approximately 13,000 statewide.

"Clearly, the data shows we are setting our foster youths up for failure despite the state's unique responsibility to ensure their well-being and ability to provide for themselves in the future," said Matt Gillard, President and CEO Michigan's Children, an independent public policy and advocacy group that has spent years pressing for improvements to Michigan's child welfare system.

"As advocates we spend a lot of time hearing from youths in foster care and bringing their voices before policymakers. By removing them from their homes, the state has made decisions about their families, about where they live and who is responsible for their care. Our state is simply failing to meet its responsibilities when youth leave foster care unable to care for themselves and become self-sufficient."

Additional key findings include:

- Homelessness is a significant problem for youths leaving foster care with Michigan falling below the national average for stable housing for these youths. Fifty-nine percent of Michigan's overall foster care population had stable housing compared to 70 percent across the country. Taking a closer look, white youths fared better than black peers with fifty percent of black youths homeless compared to 31 percent of white peers.

- Michigan also fell below national data for transitioning youth with a high school diploma or GED. By age 21, 76 percent of youths from foster care have earned a diploma or GED, compared to 66 percent of Michigan youths in the same category. The comparison between white and black youths leaving foster care in Michigan was 71 percent and 61 percent, respectively.

Michigan's Children has spotlighted the plight of youths in the state's foster care system for years. The policy group recently hosted five youth-led candidate forums in which foster care was a strong focus, particularly at a program in October on the campus of Oakland University – Rochester sponsored by several advocacy groups including the New Foster Care. Youths and foster parents took the stage to identify shortcomings in the system, and where elected officials should drive improvements. Among candidates for state Legislative offices were Lieutenant Governor-elect Garlin Gilchrist II and Republican Gubernatorial Candidate Schuette.

Addressing the candidates, Gabriella Malory, now in her '20s and a professional pet sitter, was among those who talked about their experience in foster care and afterward. She described the frustration of trying to access a college scholarship. Though she spent years in foster care, she was returned to her birth family a month shy of age 13, the qualifying cutoff for the state's Fostering Futures Scholarship. "School was my escape from the trauma at home," she said.

In its 2018 Election Brief, [Foster Care Matters](#), the organization opined that nearly half of youth in foster care have had four or more adverse experiences exposing them to toxic stress and the possibility of impaired cognitive development unless support and services are present. Compared to their peers, youth who age out of the system often face grim outcomes: failure to graduate high school, substance misuse, unemployment, homelessness, incarceration, early pregnancy, and chronic health conditions, according to the brief.

According to Gillard, the state not only needs to provide better access to scholarship and job training for youths leaving foster care but it needs to strengthen its financial support through the state budget. The scholarship program Malory spoke of is currently funded to the tune of \$750,000 statewide – a paltry sum considering those needing assistance with costly college help.

Legislative support has also been hard to come by. Though the state House approved it this year, the Children Assurance of Foster Care Quality, HB 5121-5123, is not likely to win Senate and final approval this year – its third year seeking a win before the state Legislature and Governor's Office.

On the federal side, Congress resolved nearly two decades ago to track national and state-level data and outcomes around youth who have experienced foster care through the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999.

Fostering Youth Transitions shows the clear need not only for more and better data gathering but also for better policies and practices, to give young people in foster care the best chances possible.

"We now have the data to confirm that our systems are not delivering on the commitment to ensure these youth are growing up with permanent families that would best enable them to thrive," says Leslie Gross, director of the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative®. "This new evidence makes undeniable the need to push policies that support permanence."

The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation's children by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit www.aecf.org.

Michigan's Children is an independent statewide public policy and advocacy group working to advance public policies in the best interest of children youth and families from cradle to career with a focus on closing inequities on child outcomes.