

August 20, 2021

**Dear Governor Whitmer and MDHHS Administrators:**

On December 27, 2020, Congress approved the Consolidated Appropriations Act (CAA) of 2021 with provisions for significant assistance for older youth with experience in foster care in the Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act. This resulted in Michigan receiving almost \$11 million in pandemic relief under the Chafee program to assist young adults who have aged out of foster care. To this day, however, your Administration has not disbursed these dollars to the vulnerable individuals they were intended to help. **Michigan's Children**, a nonprofit public policy advocacy group focused on child and family well-being across the state, urges you to remedy this oversight now and work with the state Legislature to release designated Chafee funds to eligible older foster care alumni to help them recover from the pandemic. *(Young people are eligible for Chafee services through age 26.)*

Nationally, at least two-thirds of states have implemented the older-youth provision of the federal funding legislation, yet Michigan continues to lag behind despite great hardships the pandemic has wrought on former wards of the state. We understand that the state House has already authorized moving Chafee funds for distribution by MDHHS, but the Senate has not yet followed suit. The final hour is upon us. Please work with Senate leadership to adopt SB36 next week and avoid the federal government's predetermined September 30 deadline for action.

The pandemic has been devastating to Michigan individuals and families, and most particularly to young people who have aged out of the foster care system. While Michigan offers resources to young people with experience in foster care to age 23, Congress extended support to those up to age 27, knowing that without a family network their struggles with food and housing insecurity (homelessness), paying on everyday living expenses (utilities, transportation), and even being able to remain in school and college, put them in peril. Typical life successes are often challenging for foster care alumni who have endured unique traumas in their early lives, but the pandemic has made circumstances far worse for them. These young adults have been unable to secure basic needs and are becoming homeless. They're struggling with physical and mental health. And they're interrupting their schooling and college careers and risking self-sufficiency because of it.

From our view, a major disappointment in Michigan's response to the crisis for this special population is one that contrasts with other areas of the country. The federal legislation explicitly provided for young adults up to age 27 to return to care during the pandemic, ensuring not just needed resources and basic needs supports, but critical daily-life case management services that would have made a real difference in how they navigated the complexities of the pandemic. To hear from the young people themselves, please review [a petition youth from foster care](#) have organized around the issue. Hear the pleas of foster care alumni in this [YouTube video](#) addressing a Michigan DHHS representative in a meeting hosted by the Park West Foundation last Friday. And in closing, let's fix what we can now. Let's adopt SB36 and move Chafee funds to older young adults from foster care who have been battered by the pandemic.

**Sincerely,**

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