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ARTICLE

Leveraging the FFPSA for Older Youth: Improving Transitions

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This is the third of three articles—here are the [first](#) and [second](#)—on how the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) might be leveraged to the benefit of older youth. The FFPSA seeks to respond to the transition needs of young people, recognizing that, in general, the transition to adulthood requires significant support and does not occur until a young person is in their mid-20s. The FFPSA also recognizes that successful transitions should begin early. To achieve these ends, the FFPSA expands the ages and time periods for which youth can be served. The following are some of the key changes:

- The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program is now renamed the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood to reflect the focus on supporting the transition to adulthood rather than a focus on the goal of “independence.”
- Transition to adulthood services begin at age 14 rather than 16.
- In addition to the existing requirement to provide young adults their vital documents and records, states must provide youth who exit the child welfare system at age 18 or older official documentation necessary to prove that the child was previously in foster care, to facilitate establishing eligibility and access to programs and services.
- States with state-funded or Title IV-E–funded extended foster care (foster care past age 18) have the option to provide Chafee aftercare services to young adults until age 23 (from age 21).
- States have the option to provide young adults Chafee education and training vouchers (ETVs) until age 26 (from age 23).

These provisions took effect in February of 2018. States must affirmatively take the options related to Chafee aftercare eligibility and ETV eligibility expansion, but states can do this at any time, according to a [Children’s Bureau program instruction](#), by updating their Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR). No additional federal funds were allocated, but provisions were put in place to create a process for states to request unspent Chafee funds.

Implementation and Planning Strategies

Advocates should ensure that case planning and court procedures are changed so that there is accountability in the provision of transition services beginning at age 14. Advocates should also ensure that there is a process in place so that documentation is being provided to youth to let them know their foster care status.

Because states have to affirmatively take the option to extend Chafee services until age 23 if the state has extended foster care, advocates should raise this issue with the state and seek stakeholder and youth input on this decision. While there are no additional funds provided to extend the age of eligibility, providing aftercare until age 23 reflects developmentally appropriate practice and can be done through state funds. The same is true of the extension of ETV eligibility.

It is likely that some states will be resistant to expanding eligibility without new funds; for that reason, advocates may have to take the lead in organizing the discussion and collecting information and data that speak to the need to provide services for longer periods of time as well as the feasibility of doing so. Pursuing these inquiries simultaneously will also set advocates up to push for an increased investment of state and local funds for aftercare services.

Individual Advocacy Strategies

- **Enforce the transition planning requirements in court and at case planning meetings.** The requirement for judicial review of transition planning is an excellent opportunity to ensure that older youth are being supported in skill development and permanency as they age. While court oversight of these provisions is required, it is not often marshaled to ensure that meaningful transition plans are developed and that orders are issued to correct plans that are not adequate. These challenges can be made from the time planning is required at age 14 to the time of discharge, which should not occur without a good plan or without the documents required under the law.
- **Ensure that your clients know about ETV and Chafee aftercare.** Attorneys should use their counseling role to provide clients information about programs and benefits that youth are eligible to receive while they are in care and upon discharge as part of the transition planning process. [Recent data](#) show that a small number of eligible youth receive education support as part of the Chafee services. Providing information, including information about ETV, can help promote access to higher education and training opportunities. Youth can use their ETV funds for an array of expenses related to the cost of attending a program of higher education and training. Also, youth are eligible for Chafee aftercare in any state in the country. (Eligibility for Chafee aftercare is based on where the youth resides.)
- **Make sure youth have proof of former foster care status and have their vital documents before they discharge from care at age 18 or older.** The FFPSA requirement to provide youth proof of foster care status when they discharge at age 18 or older has been in effect since February 2018. As part of the transition planning process, attorneys should inquire whether their client has been provided this documentation, and if not, they should ask for a court order that it be provided. It is also recommended that attorneys assist their clients in identifying a safe place to store these documents and other original vital documents that are provided as part of the discharge process and that they also store them digitally if possible.

Conclusion

The FFPSA offers opportunities to transform the child welfare system into a system that better supports youth as they transition to adulthood. Ideally, several provisions of the FFPSA will result in more youth leaving the system to permanency and not aging out. The Chafee aftercare and ETV provisions, however, provide states the opportunity to build a safety net of services and supports that more closely mirrors what youth in families receive as they transition to adulthood. While the FFPSA did not go far enough by mandating the extension of services or increasing the funding available, it does provide advocates an opportunity to develop the outlines and foundation of the service system we want to build for young people. Additional advocacy at the federal and state level will be needed to make this system as effective as possible.

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