

**Pennsylvania's Implementation of the Fostering Connections to Success
and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008
2012 Fact Sheet**

The Need

Youth in foster care (teenagers and young adults) need the support of a permanent family to guide them through the often challenging transition to adulthood. For youth in foster care who fail to find a permanent home, these basic emotional and financial supports often do not exist. Unfortunately, Pennsylvania public policy creates a financial disincentive that discourages caring adults from providing permanent homes to foster youth.

Currently, foster parents can receive financial support until a foster youth in their care turns 21 if the youth meets certain educational or treatment criteria. Yet similar financial assistance ends at age 18 for families who choose to adopt or act as legal guardians to a foster youth. This discrepancy can be a barrier to adoption for nearly 12,500 older youth in Pennsylvania's foster care system. We can remove this barrier.

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (Fostering Connections) provides federal reimbursement for states that extend adoption and legal guardianship subsidies to age 21, expand eligibility criteria for youth to remain in foster care until age 21 and allow youth to re-enter foster care between ages 18 and 21. Implementing the Fostering Connections provisions will result in more youth entering permanent families by removing the financial disincentive for foster parents who want to provide permanent homes and help youth who stay in foster care successfully transition to adulthood.

If Pennsylvania implements all policy options of Fostering Connections – including extending adoption and guardianship subsidies, extending foster care services to age 21 and allowing youth to re-enter foster care until age 21 – and if it realizes the expected reduction in foster care placement, the Corbett administration estimates the state will save \$4.5 million in FY 2012-13 and Pennsylvania's reduced investment will yield millions in additional federal support in the next fiscal year alone.

Why It Matters

For youth...

- The lifelong support of a permanent family is linked to increased high school graduation rates, college enrollment, self-esteem and physical and mental health—areas where foster youth typically fare worse than their peers.^{i,ii,iii} Eliminating the current financial disincentive to permanency will help more youth secure a permanent family through adoption or legal guardianship.
- Currently, youth who do not find a permanent family can stay in foster care until age 21 rather than age 18 if they meet certain educational or treatment requirements. Implementing the Fostering

Connections policy options will also extend foster care supports to youth who work or enroll in job training, improving their chances of becoming self-sufficient adults.

- Giving youth without permanent families the option to re-enter foster care between 18 and 21 provides a fallback plan for unexpected challenges and reduces their risk of joblessness, homelessness and incarceration.

For families...

- Extending adoption and legal guardianship subsidies to age 21 will make it possible for more foster parents and prospective adoptive parents and guardians, to provide lifelong support to a youth in need.

For Pennsylvania ...

- Pennsylvania will draw down millions of additional federal dollars and generate significant savings to the commonwealth - \$4.5 million in FY 2012-13 - and its counties due to fewer youth remaining in foster care.

Where Are We Now

In 2011, teenagers made up nearly half the children in foster care, but only about 8 percent of those adopted from the child welfare system and less than 40 percent of children who entered into legal guardianships. Caring adults who want to give foster youth a permanent family can get three more years of financial support if the youth remains in foster care. As parents, they know this support provides vital resources that can support youth needs, such as education costs.

While some older foster youth are fortunate enough to find a permanent family, many are not so lucky. Youth who become too old to stay in the system often enter adulthood without connections to caring adults or the supports needed to ensure self-sufficiency.

Currently, Pennsylvania extends foster care to age 21 for youth who are working toward their high school diploma, enrolled in post-secondary education or receiving needed treatment. No such option exists for youth who go to work or enroll in job-training programs that are not college credit bearing.

Recommendations

Pennsylvania should make the necessary statutory and regulatory changes to implement the Fostering Connections provisions. Maximum federal reimbursement can only be achieved if the provisions, listed below, are implemented as a package, rather than individually.

- Extend adoption and guardianship subsidies until age 21
- Expand eligibility criteria for youth who can remain in foster care until age 21
- Allow youth to re-enter foster care between ages 18 and 21

ⁱ Furstenberg, F. F., & Hughes, M. E. (1995). Social capital and successful development among at-risk youth. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 57(3), 580-592.

ⁱⁱ Avery, R. J. (2010). An examination of theory and promising practice for achieving permanency for teens before they age out of foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 32, 399-408.

ⁱⁱⁱ Casey Family Programs. (2008). *Improving Outcomes for Older Youth in Foster Care*. Retrieved from http://www.casey.org/resources/publications/pdf/WhitePaper_ImprovingOutcomesOlderYouth_FR.pdf