



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

HB0628: Human Services- Universal Basic Income for Transition-Age Youth Program-Establishment

POSITION: Support

BY: Linda Kohn, President

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The League of Women Voters of Maryland is a nonpartisan organization that works to influence public policy through education and advocacy. **The League believes that people whose earnings are inadequate have the right to an income and/or services sufficient to meet their basic needs for food, shelter, and access to health care, and that social policy should include a goal of reducing poverty. The League therefore supports HB 628, as the guaranteed basic income of \$1,000 per month for the first three years will help ensure the well-being of transition-age youth who leave Maryland's foster care system at age 21.**

Many young people easing into independence and adulthood rely on their families for financial help. Families can provide support by enabling them, for example, to live at home while completing their education or job training. This can give them the opportunity to mature and gain life experience while remaining safe. But young people aging out of foster care rarely have those options. State support abruptly ends on their 21st birthday. They then are suddenly expected to be self-sufficient, and to be able to pay for housing, food, transportation, and other basic needs on their own. As a Washington Post article¹ noted: **"It's jarring to imagine what happens to kids who are simply evicted into adulthood."**

These young people can struggle greatly during this very difficult transition period. A University of Maryland study notes:² "They face a disproportionate risk of drug and alcohol abuse, mental health issues, economic instability, criminal justice involvement, becoming young parents, and future homelessness.... Youth exiting foster care often had secure housing for the first three months...but the majority soon became unable to manage rent, resulting in **99% who had stayed in emergency shelters since exiting foster care within 6 months of leaving care...**" In addition to homelessness, 2021 statistics on Maryland foster care youth at age 21 indicate that 16% were incarcerated, 28% were young parents, and only 54% were employed full or part-time.³ Maryland numbers reinforce the fact that this is an equity issue, as 60% of Maryland's foster care population in 2021 was Black, while only 24% of the foster care population in the U.S. that year was Black.⁴

The guaranteed income provided in this program will help alleviate some of the instability and danger of this period for our transition-age youth. It will help bridge the gap between foster care and self-sufficiency, helping those vulnerable young people better meet their basic needs as they learn to become independent adults. The League and its 2,000 members urge a favorable report on House Bill 628.

¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/02/08/foster-care-graduates-ongoing-support/>

² <https://www.youthreachmd.com/content/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/YRMD-Foster-Youth-Policy-Paper.pdf>

³ <https://assets.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-fosteringyouth-stateprofile-MD.pdf>

⁴ Ibid