
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL HOUSE BILL 628
Human Services- Universal Basic Income for Transition- Age Youth Program -
Establishment
Appropriations Committee
March 10, 2026

Social Work Advocates for Social Change strongly supports HB 628, which would establish a Universal Basic Income (UBI) program to provide three years of critical financial support of \$1,000 per month to foster-youth exiting care at 18 years old. The transition into adulthood and independence is challenging for many young adults. Transition age foster youth face greater challenges and often have less stability and support than their peers, which lead to higher rates of homelessness,ⁱ un- and under-employment,ⁱⁱ ⁱⁱⁱand behavioral health struggles. Maryland has a responsibility to provide needed supports to the youth who have been in its care, which will improve their lives and strengthen our state.

HB 628 will provide essential financial supports to foster youths and alleviate many of the predictable struggles faced by youth aging out of care. In child welfare, youth at 18 are often said to “age-out” of care. Though Maryland allows young people to remain in extended foster care until age 21, they must meet specific education and employment requirements. For many youth who have been in foster care for years, these expectations are difficult to maintain as the youth work to become independent. Foster youth are often subjected to numerous, rapid changes in caseworkers, homes, schools, and intermittent relationships with family and peers. By the time they are 18, they are ready to have greater control over their own lives; however, due to a lack of continued and consistent support (e.g., monetary, emotional, social), many youth struggle significantly during this transition.^{iv}

Lack of adequate transition-age support has long term impact for the youth and our State. Youth who exit foster care experience disproportionately high rates of housing instability and homelessness within the first years of leaving the system – independent of their existing at 18 or 21. An estimated 20% of young adults who are in care become homeless the moment they are emancipated^v – with as many as 31-46% of foster youth experiencing homelessness by their 26th birthday.^{vi} Without a stable financial foundation, many youths are forced to make uncomfortable and unsafe decisions to survive. These decisions lead to couch surfing, unsafe housing arrangements, and prioritizing immediate income over education or long-term career development. Transition-age youths deserve better. They should be able to pay rent, afford transportation, purchase groceries, and manage basic expenses while pursuing education and employment. **A Universal Basic Income program for transition-age youth would support their achievement critical milestones like pursuing a degree and finding rewarding work.**^{vii}

Just as importantly, it would provide transition-age youths with a rare experience: peace of mind. Knowing that a reliable source of financial support exists, even at a modest level, can significantly reduce stress and improve mental health. When young people are not constantly focused on day-to-day survival, they are better able to focus on school, work, relationship building, long-term planning, and emotional growth.

Evidence from guaranteed income programs across the country supports HB 628's approach. According to research by the National League of Cities, cities implementing UBI pilots have seen improvements in transition age youths' financial stability, employment, and well-being.^{viii} In Maryland, MoCo BOOST, a UBI pilot in Montgomery County, found significant results in just 18 months. In the study, 73% of participants reported improvements in housing stability and quality. Most participants reduced debt and reported improved mental health outcomes compared with the control group.^{ix}

HB 628's universal basic income program is founded on the simple principle that transition-age youth deserve the same support to build a stable future that many of their peers receive from their families. Maryland can be a leader in child-welfare aftercare for some of the state's most vulnerable youth. Establishing a Universal Basic Income program for youth exiting care would be a meaningful investment in the well-being and long-term success of youth across the state. This early investment is not only humane, it will promote long-term stability for youth and may lead to downstream cost savings for the state.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change strongly urges a favorable report on HB 628.

ⁱ Dworsky, A., Napolitano, L., & Courtney, M. (2013). Homelessness during the transition from foster care to adulthood. *American journal of public health, 103 Suppl 2*(Suppl 2), S318–S323.

<https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2013.301455>

ⁱⁱ Courtney, M. E., Dworsky, A. L., Lee, J. S., & Raap, M. (2010). Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Outcomes at ages 23 and 24 (pp. 1097-3125). Chicago: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

ⁱⁱⁱ Zinn, A., & Courtney, M. (2015). Helping foster youth find a job: A random-assignment evaluation of an employment assistance programme for emancipating youth. *Child & Family Social Work*. Advance online publication.

<https://doi:10.1111/cfs.12212>

^{iv} Park et al. (2026). Risks of Incarceration: Impact of Social Support Networks during the Transition to Adulthood.

<https://doi-org.proxy-hs.researchport.umd.edu/10.1093/swr/svaf026>

^v National Foster Youth Initiative (n.d.) Many alumni of care struggle to find permanent, affordable housing.

<https://nfyi.org/issues/homelessness-2/>

^{vi} Dworsky, A., Napolitano, L., & Courtney, M., (2013).

^{vii} Peters, C. M., Sherraden, M., & Kuchinski, A. M. (2016). From foster care to adulthood: The role of income. *Journal of Public Child Welfare, 10*(1), 39–58.

^{viii} National League of Cities. (2018, October 30). *Basic income in cities: A guide to city experiments and pilot projects*.

<https://www.nlc.org/resource/universal-basic-income-whos-piloting-it/>

^{ix} Harvey, D., Bogle, M., Fung, L., & Garcia, R. (2024, September). *Montgomery County guaranteed income pilot: Participant outcomes at 18 months*. Urban Institute.

https://collaborationcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/Montgomery_County_Guaranteed_Income_Pilot-Interim- Outcomes_September_2024.pdf