

THE COALITION TO PROTECT MARYLAND'S CHILDREN

Our Mission: To combine and amplify the power of organizations and citizens working together to keep children safe from abuse and neglect. We strive to secure the budgetary and public policy resources to make meaningful and measurable improvements in safety, permanence, and well-being.

House Appropriations Committee
HB 774 – Human Services –
Universal Basic Income for Transition- Age Youth - Establishment
Support with Amendment

March 10, 2022

The Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children (CPMC) is a consortium of Maryland organizations and individuals formed in 1996 to promote meaningful child welfare reform. As HB 774 would provide vital financial support to youth exiting the foster care system, CPMC urges a favorable report with an amendment.

Preparing Maryland for a prosperous future begins with recognizing that our youngest residents must get what they need today to become the adults who will strengthen our communities and build our economy. Fortunately, what our youth need is not a mystery. Recent advances in the science of early childhood development tell us that the early years are a time when the brain is literally building itself from the ground up, in much the way a house is constructed. And, it is the relationships and experiences children have early in life that are the building blocks for the skills they need to remain healthy, and to succeed in school, in relationships, and in the workforce.

Youth often age out of foster care without strong social networks and financial safety-nets. Without these supports, "transition age youth face a disproportionate risk of drug and alcohol abuse, mental health issues, economic instability, criminal justice involvement, becoming young parents, and future homelessness."¹ Foster youth are particularly vulnerable to severe and prolonged housing instability. While the Ready by 21 initiative has created a framework to address the needs of transition age youth, much work remains to be done.

Providing youth transitioning out of care with \$1,000 per month for three years would add a new tool to help to ease this transition period. Youth would have a steady income stream to help them secure housing and meet basic needs while they establish themselves as adults. The flexibility of this approach allows youth to prioritize the use of the funds based on their unique circumstances.

We do ask for clarifying language in the bill that the benefit should begin when the youth ages out of foster care. In Maryland, youth may remain in foster care and access the resources and benefits of care until they are 21. We do not want to create an incentive for youth to leave care early. Delaying the start of the benefit would incentivize youth to take full advantage of the services available until they turn 21 and then provide for a smoother transition.

For those reasons stated above we urge the committee to adopt an amendment clarifying the benefit is available when a youth ages out of foster care and then to issue a favorable committee report on HB 774.

¹ Youth Homelessness Among Foster Care Alumni: An analysis of the needs of Maryland's former foster youth experiencing homelessness from the 2018 Youth REACH MD data. July 2019. Suzanne Korff, MSW, Amanda Miller, MSW, Jay Unick, PhD, MSW. The Institute for Innovation and Implementation. School of Social Work, University of Maryland, Baltimore. Accessed at: <https://www.youthreachmd.com/content/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/YRMD-Foster-Youth-Policy-Paper.pdf>