

Support with Amendments HB 849

Human Services – Universal Basic Income for Transition–Age Youth –Establishment
Testimony of Aubrey Edwards-Luce, MSW, Esq.
Wednesday, March 6, 2024
House Appropriations Committee

Chair Barnes, Vice-Chair Chang and Esteemed Members of the Committee,

I am the Executive Director of the Sayra and Neil Meyerhoff Center for Families, Children and the Courts (CFCC) at the University of Baltimore School of Law. CFCC envisions communities where children and families thrive without unnecessary involvement in the legal system. We engage communities in all that we do to work towards transforming systems that create barriers to family well-being. We believe that young people transitioning from foster care should be set up for stability and success. We offer our enthusiastic **support for HB 849 and propose amendments** to strengthen this important bill.

Approximately 290 youth “age out” of foster care each year in Maryland during the past 5 years.¹ Aging out refers to the process of exiting foster care without achieving reunification, adoption, or guardianship. Aging out of foster care is associated with increased risks of experiencing “behavioral, mental and physical health issues, housing problems and homelessness, employment and academic difficulties, early parenthood, incarceration and other potentially lifelong adversities. In line with the racial inequities noted earlier, youth of color are more likely to experience these challenges.”²

Youth aging out of foster care are not less capable than their peers, but they are under supported. Federal timelines imposed by the Adoption and Safe Families Act makes it almost inevitable that every youth who ages out of foster care is a legal orphan³ and, therefore, has no legal relationship with their families of origin. The termination of parental rights often means that young people who exit foster care aren’t able to be like the 75% of their peers who report that they “sometimes” turn to their parents for advice about their “financial situation (79%), their career or job situation (77%), and their physical health (75%).”⁴

As a former guardian *ad litem* attorney, I have walked alongside transition-aged youth in foster care as they prepare to age out and it was always an incredibly anxious and volatile time for my clients. The stress my clients felt as they tried to figure out meeting their most essential needs without a safety net negatively influenced every aspect of their lives—their sleep, their health, their parenting decisions, their housing plans and their employment and education decisions were all influenced by my clients’ impending sense of abandonment.

¹The Annie E. Casey Foundation. *Kids Count Data Center: Maryland*, (2024) calculated from data available at <https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/7718-aged-out?loc=22&loc=2#detailed/2/any/false/1096,2545,1095,2048,574,1729/4491,4492,4493,4494,4495,4496,4497,4498,4499,4500,4501,4502,4879/14889>

² The Annie E. Casey Foundation. *Child Welfare and Foster Care Statistics*, (May 30, 2023) available at https://www.aecf.org/blog/child-welfare-and-foster-care-statistics?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAiA_5WvBhBAEiwAZtCU74NPsNg4uy83Yg-b1Fi3CNQh6cZ5IJKC9iqIAIbl-LATJX402YWI4hoCjaYQAvD_BwE

³ United Family Advocates. *Adoptions and Safe Families Act: An ASFA Overhaul to Center Family Connections, Relief for Children of Incarcerated Parents, and our #stoptheclock Campaign*, available at <https://www.unitedfamilyadvocates.org/adoption-and-safe-families-act>

⁴ Rachel Minkin, Kim Parker, Juliana Menasce Horowitz and Carolina Aragão. *Parents, Young Adults, Children and the Transition to Adulthood: Young adults’ relationship with their parents*. THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER. (Jan. 25, 2024) <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2024/01/25/young-adults-relationship-with-their-parents/#:~:text=31%25%20of%20young%20adults%20say,say%20this%20about%20their%20mothers.>

The practice of providing universal basic income to transition-aged youth has been piloted in various localities.⁵ If enacted, HB 849 will provide youth who were in foster care at age 18, a monthly universal basic income (UBI) payment of \$1000 for a maximum of three years. Such a safety net could help young people find their footing on their own path that avoids the negative outcomes that often plague youth who age out of foster care. These payments are a fair, needed and smart investment in Maryland's young people.

These unrestricted cash payments will:

- Supply young people who transitioning from foster care more of the support that government legal action deprived them of and make them more similarly positioned as their peer;
- Provide young people transitioning from foster care the opportunity to develop financial literacy and budget management skills; and
- Give young people transitioning from foster care financial stability to avoid costly negative outcomes.

While the COVID-19 virus caused as multiple child welfare agency esagencies Add in Education Status? As written HB 849 will have a positive impact on Youth transitioning from Foster care and their children. However, we recommend the following amendments to strengthen bill:

- Change age to include the upper range of transition aged youth, which is 24 year olds,⁶
- Require the department to educate youth in foster care who are 16 years of age on the UBI program

We urge you to support HB 849 with amendments.

⁵ National League of Cities. <https://www.nlc.org/resource/universal-basic-income-whos-piloting-it/>

⁶ Youth.Gov <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/transition-age-youth>