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HB1121 - Child Care Scholarship Program - Youth Transitioning From Foster Placement to Successful Adulthood Pilot Program - Establishment

House Ways and Means Committee

POSITION: SUPPORT

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of Arrow Child & Family Ministries, we are writing to express our unwavering support for House Bill 1121, a critical piece of legislation that would begin to address one of the barriers older youths in foster care can face in being successful.

Young adults in foster care who “age out of care”, in other words, reach the age of 21 while residing in foster care, face significant hurdles to be successful in adulthood. Young people who age out of foster care are more likely to experience hardships such as homelessness, joblessness, early parenthood and substance use. For foster youth who are also parents, these risks are even higher. To help address this, the Social Services Administration operates Ready by 21 programming to support the development of independent living skills. Some youth are placed in Treatment Foster Care or Independent Living Programs licensed to place foster youth who are parents. Despite these resources, this is still a group of young people at very high risk for the above mentioned negative outcomes. The Annie E Casey Foundation estimates the economic impact of young people aging out of care and failing to keep pace with their general population peers: about \$4.1 billion for each new group of youth aging out of foster care.

Data on how many foster youth are also parents does not seem to be publicly available, nor is data on how many youth are placed in Treatment Foster Care or Independent Living Programs licensed to place foster youth who are parents. However, providers who work with these youth report that access to child care is a significant barrier to consistent employment and educational completion, whether that be high school or college. At this time, we have anecdotal evidence of some of the barriers. These include the requirement that the applicant must be “working or employed in an approved training program or attending school,” and the requirement of including the other parent’s information in the application, especially in situations of domestic violence or simply fear of losing custody.

It has been asked why this requires legislation and why the youths’ social workers or foster parents don’t just provide more help to the youth. Our response is that these people are helping the youth and if the youth is running into barriers that can best be addressed systemically,

that is what should be done. It is also why we support a pilot program. This will allow time for evaluation of the issues and solutions to be experimented with and will allow data to be collected and used to ensure interventions are effective.

Youth who age out of foster care are some of the highest risk of any young people for negative outcomes. HB 1121 addresses one small barrier to the success for one, very high risk, subset of these youth. But by building supports, even one small step at a time, is how we make progress and we have a lot of progress to make. Therefore, I urge the committee to support HB 1121.

Thank you.

Robert Basler, LCSW-C

Associate Vice President

Arrow Child & Family Ministries

