



The Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio (OHIO) Youth Advisory Board exists to be the knowledgeable statewide voice that influences policies and practices that impact youth who have or will experience out of home care.

February 22, 2022

Good morning,

This message is directed to Governor DeWine and to the leadership team at the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services.

My name is Lisa Dickson, and I am a former foster youth who serves as a volunteer facilitator of the Ohio Youth Advisory Board, which is a statewide organization of young people (ages 14-24) who have experienced foster care.

I am writing to request that the state of Ohio extend foster care until age 23, as authorized by the federal Family First Act. According to Section 303(a)(2)(C)(ii) of the Family First Prevention Services Act, states are eligible to elect to extend the use of Chafee funding to serve former foster youth through the age of 23.

Young people enter foster care due to factors outside of their control, such as experiencing neglect, abuse or disconnection from a parent due to death, incarceration or substance abuse challenges. As foster youth, we do not choose the family we are born into – we can only make our own choices. In the midst of family upheaval, all we can do is seek to navigate the moment at hand and try to figure out how to build a less chaotic future. We often feel alone in this struggle.

Leaving home and moving out on your own is a milestone that many young people look forward to... But for young people in foster care, this experience often catapults them into an immediate struggle to survive. As a young person shared with me last week, *"I never had a family in the first place, so now I don't have a family to lean back on."*

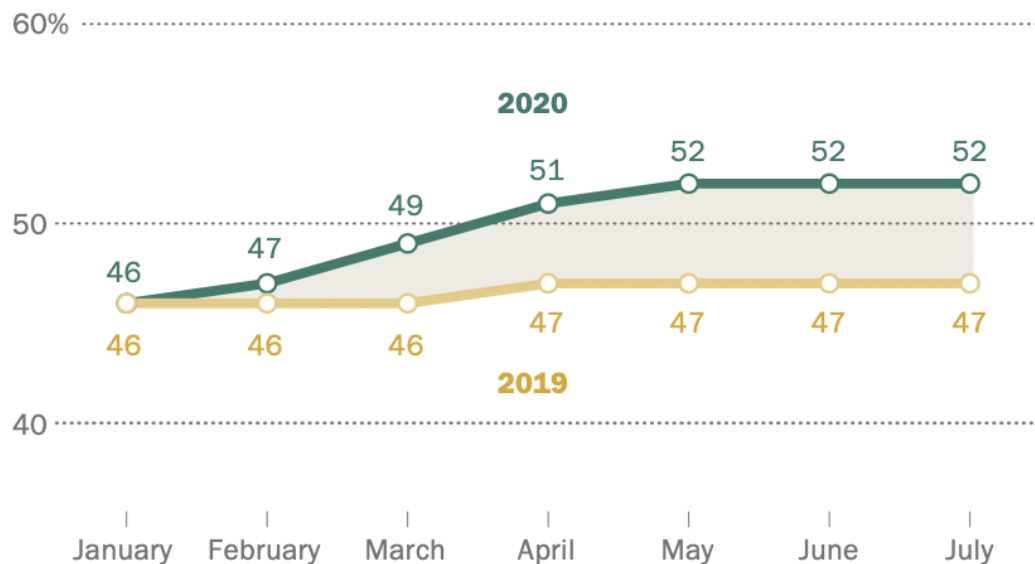
What young people need the most when striving to succeed in young adulthood is unconditional and long-lasting support. But for former fosters, everything comes with conditions, from the moment they turn 18. It is unrealistic to expect foster youth whose decisions have always been made for them to magically know how to successfully navigate complex systems and eligibility requirements.

Especially now, in the midst of the ongoing pandemic. According to the PEW research center, one-fourth of young adults between ages 16-24 have lost their jobs during the COVID-19 economic downturn. University campuses and dorms have been negatively impacted. The share of 16- to 24-year-olds who are neither enrolled in school nor employed more than doubled from February (11%) to June (28%) due to the pandemic and consequent economic downturn.

More young adults than ever are returning home for help. In July 2020, 52% of young adults in the US resided with one or both of their parents, according to a Pew Research Center. This is a higher percentage than any previous measurement, including during the Great Depression.

COVID-19 disruptions associated with a large increase in the share of young adults living with parent(s)

% of 18- to 29-year-olds in U.S. living with a parent



Note: "Living with a parent" refers to those who are residing with at least one parent in the household.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 2019 and 2020 Current Population Survey monthly files.

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The difference lies in having a place to come home to... For those who 'age out' of foster youth this is often either (a.) not an option or (b.) not a safe option.

Extending foster care to 23 will create a longer runway to help Ohio youth succeed in young adulthood. Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony and for recognizing the urgency of Ohio making this change as soon as possible. The lives and futures of Ohio young people are literally at stake.

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