



ACF – Youth Who Self-Report Abuse

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) regularly hears from biological parents, kinship caregivers, foster parents, and child welfare personnel – **it's vitally important to hear from the youth themselves.**

In Ohio, foster care youth, alumni, and allies successfully advocated for the establishment of a Youth Ombudsman Office. A challenge that we had previously noted, and that subsequent annual reports by the Ombuds Office have confirmed, is that county child abuse hotlines frequently "screen out" self-reports of abuse made directly by youth.

When this happens, that young person has no immediate recourse; both Childhelp and Ohio's statewide 24-hour Child Abuse Hotline simply redirect them back to the county child abuse hotline that previously rejected them.

Brainstorming with ACF Leadership:

1. Avoiding a dangerous overcorrection: Reducing the number of youth in foster care must not compromise child and teen safety.

- **The Illusion of Success:** On paper, a reduction in foster care numbers might look like success. However, as one youth leader warns, it can mask a dark reality: *"It can mean that the abuse is not being reported or that a young person who is experiencing abuse is not being listened to. This is extremely dangerous."*
- **The Systemic Pendulum Swing:** This issue highlights a classic systemic pendulum swing, in which policies drastically oscillate between two extremes. The current push for child welfare reform risks a dangerous overcorrection, creating an environment where the system hesitates to bring youth into care even when failing to do so jeopardizes their immediate safety.
- **A Youth-Centered Mandate:** To prevent this dangerous swing, **the system must remain firmly youth-centered, prioritizing the safety, welfare, and best interests of the youth** over bureaucratic metrics or parental property interests.

2. Foster homes must also be safe. With the national implementation of *A Home for Every Child*, what efforts are being made to ensure that states have the infrastructure to vet, train and retain an increased pool of foster parents?

As federal guidance shifts toward expanding capacity, ACF must address critical questions regarding the execution of this rollout:

- **Safety Risks Vs. Speed:** Will streamlining foster parent recruitment, background checks, and licensing timelines create unintended safety risks for children?
- **Thoroughness of Evaluation:** Will compressed timelines pressure caseworkers to rush home-study assessments?
- **Readiness for the Role:** How will applicants' psychological readiness and capacity to care for traumatized youth be accurately measured within a streamlined process?
- **Robust Training:** Foster parent training is vital for caregivers to be trauma-informed and knowledgeable about resources to help teens in foster care succeed. How will the federal infrastructure ensure that streamlined processes do not cut corners on essential, deep-dive training regarding youth trauma and behavioral health?

Ohio foster care youth and alumni would love to be involved in and support national trainings and safeguards regarding the specialized knowledge and resources needed to support older youth transitioning into adulthood.

Below is a diagram from our work in Ohio on this topic.

- **Foster Parent Retention:** Recruiting an increased pool of foster parents is ineffective if they quickly exit the system. What strategies are being funded to provide ongoing support to families after licensure? What federal infrastructure investments are being made to provide foster families with respite care, peer support networks, and crisis intervention to ensure long-term retention?

