

STABILIZATION SUPPORTS FOR FOSTER YOUTH

Los Angeles County has approximately 25,000 youth in the child welfare system, including those awaiting adoption finalization. Many of these youth report ongoing mental health challenges, difficulties in identifying stable housing once they reach transition age, and for those who are a parenting foster youth, problems in finding affordable and accessible childcare.

The Board has continued to support our foster youth and advocated to maintain stable funding from the State of California. On January 23, 2024, the Board approved the motion "Los Angeles County's Child Welfare's Response to the Proposed Budget" of California, which advocated to support funding for foster youth programs related to housing and mental health supports. The County also took steps to support federal legislation such as H.R. 7010 in March 2024, which would remove barriers to housing such as requirements to work or attend school.

Unfortunately, barriers still exist. The most recent census of unhoused Angelenos found that LA County had 3,718 homeless transition-age youth, and around 50% of those exiting foster care may experience homelessness or housing instability. Working with our housing navigators at the County, we can reduce this number and ensure we are connecting youth to available and appropriate housing. Both the unhoused and housed foster youth population may have mental health needs that could contribute to difficulty in finding stable housing, and this Board has championed programs that help those with mental health needs.

Our foster youth are further challenged in accessing appropriate mental health resources. Current wait times in areas of the County can reach up to three months for youth who have already been traumatized in their home by their caregivers or parents. These wait times are in part due to a shortage of trained mental health therapists across the County. The Board has worked to expand workforce development programs that train and educate our residents in career pathways in childcare, human services, and mental health positions, especially in our geographically remote parts of the County. Ensuring there are adequate staffing levels at the County and partnering with our community-based organizations will help to address these wait times.

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According to the National Foster Youth Institute (NFYI), launched by City of Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass, approximately 80% of former foster youth will experience a mental health issue in their lifetime. There is no “one size fits all” solution to this issue and we need to increase access to mental health care that is diverse and inclusive of all foster youth. Ensuring we can connect foster youth to existing mental health resources, training all staff that are interacting with these youth in trauma informed methods, and expanding workforce development programs that encourage our foster youth and other youth to consider careers in mental health and human services will help these youth.

Another challenge we can improve upon is access to affordable childcare for parenting foster youth. In some situations, our youth cannot address their mental health needs or attend school or work because of difficulties in accessing childcare programs in the County, given the dearth of available childcare spots. The Emergency Child Care Bridge Program for Foster Children (Bridge Program) is one such program that can help to address this issue. The Bridge Program, a partnership with DCFS, the Child Care Alliance of Los Angeles (CCALA), and its partner agencies, is a time-limited program designed to increase the number of foster children successfully placed in home-based family care settings, increase capacity of childcare programs to meet the needs of foster children in their care, and maximize funding to support the childcare needs of eligible families. The Governor’s May Revision includes a proposed funding reduction to this program. Ensuring stable funding for the Bridge Program will help our youth most in need of childcare programs.

WE, THEREFORE MOVE, that the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), the Department of Health Services, and other appropriate departments, to report back in 90 days on plans to increase access to housing for TAY youth by:

1. Identifying ways to enhance housing for Transition Age Youth (TAY) youth and include utilizing housing navigators; and
2. Prioritizing housing for parenting youth who often fall between housing services and implement a transitional housing program that prioritizes placing all parenting youth in housing before exiting the Independent Living Program (ILP).

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WE, FURTHER MOVE, that the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Mental Health (DMH), the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO), and other appropriate departments, to report back in 90 days on plans to expand awareness of appropriate mental health programs and career pathways, including by taking the following actions:

1. Providing trauma informed trainings for DCFS staff, DMH clinicians, and providers working to ensure the needs of pregnant and parenting foster youth are addressed and that appropriate resources are provided;
2. Expanding existing pathways to mental health careers for those with lived experience in foster care, including community health worker programs, near to peer mentoring, with supports through DEO's economic and workforce development system; and
3. Promoting the "Who to Call" campaign which will help inform the community about community-based responses to health and mental health crises to DCFS foster youth, families, and other system impacted youth once the program is launched in July 2024;

WE, FURTHER MOVE, that the Board of Supervisors direct CEO-Legislative Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations branch to oppose the Governor's May Revision proposal to reduce the funding for the Emergency Child Care Bridge Program for Foster Children (Bridge Program) by \$34.8 million in FY 2024-25 and ongoing.

WE, FURTHER MOVE, that the Board of Supervisors direct the Office of Advancement of Early Care and Education, within the Department of Public Health, along with DCFS and other appropriate departments, to report back in 90 days on plans to partner with the Child Care Alliance of Los Angeles to strengthen coordination of services for parenting foster youth to ensure they receive prompt and efficient delivery of childcare vouchers, especially through the Emergency Child Care Bridge Program for Foster Children.

WE, FURTHER MOVE, that the Board of Supervisors direct DCFS, DMH, DHS, and DEO make a verbal presentation to the Board during its September 17, 2024 meeting on the progress achieved on the above.

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