AGN. NO.

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HOUSING SUPPORTS FOR FOSTER YOUTH

Los Angeles County has fewer than 24,000 youth in the child welfare system, including those awaiting adoption finalization. Over the past few years, the County has focused on the housing challenges in the region as an issue of utmost importance and worked to improve the number of transitional and permanent housing locations to serve people experiencing homelessness, low-income families, and foster youth, among other populations. The most recent census of unhoused Angelenos found that LA County had 3,718 homeless transition-age youth, and around 50% of those leaving foster care may experience homelessness or housing instability.

The County's Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) has recognized the need to provide specialized housing support for foster youth in and exiting care. In 2022, DCFS created the Supportive Housing Division, to streamline access to housing services for people ages 18 to 24. The Supportive Housing Division works with various community-based organizations, the County's Homeless Initiative (CEO-HI), the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), the Department of Health Services' Housing for Health, and local development and public housing authorities to ensure foster youth have access to housing options and resources.

One of the most promising housing resources available exclusively to foster youth are the Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Initiative and Family Unification Program (FUP) vouchers. These are two types of Housing Choice Vouchers from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development that are available to Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) that work in partnership with Public Child Welfare Agencies (PCWA). FYI and FUP vouchers are intended to support foster youth as they transition out of foster care or for young people who have already aged out and become homeless. Any PHA that administers Housing Choice Vouchers can apply or request FYI and FUP vouchers when they execute a Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with a PCWA.

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Through the FUP and the FYI Initiative, PHAs can house eligible foster youth for 36 months with a possible extension of 24 months, while providing the necessary supportive services for participants to attain self-sufficiency. The Los Angeles County Development Authority (LACDA) has a Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program local preference that prioritizes FUP youth that are at risk of housing instability due to a FUP time expiration. However, its use hinders on voucher availability and the youth's ability to meet the HCV Program admission requirements. Ideally, this time frame would be eliminated to allow foster youth more time to receive stabilization supports such as wraparound services, childcare, job training, and more. Additionally, youth have expressed difficulties in accessing the limited vouchers, completing the labor intensive PHA application process, and identifying property owners who will accept the voucher.

While many of the County's 19 PHAs have already begun working with DCFS to secure more FYI and FUP vouchers, more can be done to ensure the region is applying for and receiving any and all federal subsidies and vouchers allocated to support youth housing. LACDA recently discussed FYI and FUP vouchers with the region's PHAs, highlighting their success in providing FYI vouchers and encouraging and supporting other PHAs to secure more vouchers for current and former foster youth. Recently, six PHAs have established MOUs with DCFS and will begin drawing down these vouchers. This is progress and we need to continue this momentum.

WE, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Children and Family Services, to report back in 90 days on plans to:

1. Increase access to Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Initiative vouchers through the following:
    a. Partnering with the Los Angeles County Development Authority (LACDA) to outreach to stakeholders such as the California Apartment Association on messaging campaigns and potential partnerships with property owners who may be unfamiliar with Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Initiative vouchers to increase the number of property owners who accept the vouchers. Outreach should also include youth housing organizations, such as Safe Place for Youth, that can help identify best practices in working with rental properties;
    b. Partnering with the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), the Department of Health Services, the Department of Youth Development, and the Probation Department, to identify and engage potentially eligible youth, Non-Minor Dependents, or individuals who have left foster care, are under age 25,and are homeless or at risk of homelessness to prepare a pool of targeted youth who can be immediately referred to Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) who receive an allocation of Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Initiative vouchers;

   c. Collaborate with the Chief Executive Office to conduct a fiscal analysis of the cost (e.g., staffing) for DCFS to outreach and execute MOUs with the Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) in the County of Los Angeles, to support the referral, application, and lease up process for youth pursuing the Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Initiative voucher and a housing unit, and any services provided (or projected to be provided) by the Department to cover the needs of youth pursuing or enrolled in the program (mindful that as more Family Unification Program (FUP) vouchers are allocated to the County's Public Housing Authorities (PHAs), the work for DCFS in support of the youth will grow). Report on the cost to administer Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Initiative vouchers and pay for its service requirements, describe the public funding sources for this purpose and how those funds are currently allocated, and any funding gaps that are likely preventing higher utilization of Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Initiative vouchers; and
   d. Authorizing DCFS to execute MOUs with the remaining Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) in the County of Los Angeles.
2. Identify ways to improve training for DCFS and Probation staff on housing options for Transition Age Youth; thoughtfully integrating the work with the greater homeless service response system overseen by the CEO- Homeless Initiative and LAHSA.
3. In partnership with LAHSA and the CEO-Homeless Initiative, assess how available housing can be prioritized for parenting youth who often fall into homelessness and implement a transitional housing program that places all parenting youth in housing before they exit the Independent Living Program (ILP).
4. Support the development of life skills relevant to housing stability by reinforcing existing programs, such as ILP online, to support skill development, including financial literacy and awareness of housing rights and responsibilities among youth in foster care. Explore if specialized life skills programs for young tenants should be added to the ILP program.
5. Partner with the CEO-Homeless Initiative and Department of Health Services' Housing for Health, to identify slots of Intensive Case Management Services to be committed for each Family Unification Program (FUP) voucher allocated to any Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) in the County that has no other funding source for supportive services.
   a. In collaboration with the Center for Strategic Partnerships, engage the philanthropic sector and forge public private partnerships to support the increased take up and utilization of vouchers, which could include pilot funding for the Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Initiative program, including administrative costs, housing navigation support for the youth, and the ongoing supportive services associated with Housing and Urban Development's Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Initiative requirements.

6. Partner with the Department of Mental Health (DMH) to provide:
    a. A summary of the referral pathways for the youth into DMH services, identify what clinical supports DMH has available to support TAY with vouchers for those who needs services, include summary information on the referral process and how DMH can partner with the youth's existing service provider(s) to coordinate care;
    b. An overview of funding and services committed to these youth in order to determine how DMH will fund prioritized slots for immediate connection with youth, and how DMH will partner with the youth's existing service providers to coordinate care and train the DMH network on the Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Initiative application process for youth exiting the foster care system and identify youth who are eligible or enrolled for the Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Initiative voucher; and
    c. Quarterly data reports on DMH supports being offered to these youth, and metrics tracked to assess impact.
7. Collaborate with the Los Angeles County Development Authority (LACDA) and report on the number of vouchers received by all Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) administering Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Initiative and Family Unification Program (FUP) vouchers, vouchers issued, successful lease up of units, and annual retention numbers to the Board twice annually. Maintain regular tracking of the number of Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Initiative and Family Unification Program (FUP) vouchers successfully leased up to monitor voucher usage and success and provide to the Board biannually.

WE, FURTHER MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Los Angeles County Development Authority to report back in 90 days on the feasibility, cost, and timeline to engage legal services to reach out to property owners who will not accept the Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Initiative or Family Unification Program (FUP) vouchers. If available, legal representatives can provide educational information to property owners on the "Fair Employment and Housing Act," the California state law that prevents source of income discrimination. Some Public Housing Authorities in the County have employed legal representatives to provide this owner education, and the results have been positive.

WE, FURTHER MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the CEO-Legislative Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations Branch, in partnership with the LACDA, to continue advocating at the federal level to remove the time limit restrictions for foster youth assistance and allow Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) to provide foster youth uninterrupted and continuous rental assistance through the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program.

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WE, FURTHER MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct DCFS, in collaboration with CEO-HI, to create a plan for the County to enter into master leasing interim and permanent housing for DCFS TAY youth, with a focus on those with Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Initiative / Family Unification Program (FUP) housing vouchers; and consider ways foster youth can be prioritized for housing.

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