

**Dept. of Legislative Services Office of Policy Analysis, Maryland General Assembly  
Workgroup Assignment:**

**In preparation for the September 3rd meeting, we request that your organization or agency submit a response regarding the following topics as they relate to the policy areas, programs, and services administered by your organization or agency. The written responses may be submitted to workgroup staff by Friday, August 23rd to be included in the meeting materials. The response should discuss:**

**The unique needs of unaccompanied homeless minors**

There are definitional complications around the term “unaccompanied minors.” The term could refer to an unsupervised child and/or homeless youth. It could also refer to migrant or immigrant children in the US that are unaccompanied by a parent.

Minor youth who are Maryland citizens/residents, who present as homeless, must be referred to the LDSS pursuant to the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) child welfare federal mandate. This federal law provides guidance to States on how to protect and serve children who are victims of abuse, neglect, or abandonment.

Unaccompanied homeless youth between the ages of 14 -17 are designated as children in need of assistance (CINA) due to neglect if they do not have a parent or guardian willing or able to care for them. Often times, unaccompanied youth come from families with severe dysfunction. This includes substance abuse, mental illness, physical illness, domestic violence, and poverty. Many of these youth lack relative or community resources and supports. Occasionally, LDSS intervention may trigger a youth to run away, which puts them at greater risk for trafficking and homelessness. Ultimately, these youth have a higher rate of adverse childhood experiences that can affect their everyday functioning and development and their ability to successfully transition into adulthood. Due to stability issues, these youth are at an increased risk to have mental, behavior, and physical health issues. Poverty, domestic violence, parental addiction, sexual orientation, and gender identity issues can often be a conduit to family separation.

Youth who experience these types of situations have unique needs, and require support to address their physical, behavioral, and emotional health, as well as educational needs. Youth need supportive connections, whether within a family or the community that lead to permanency and stability. In addition, youth need enhanced life and relationship skills to help them identify dangerous situations, in order to safeguard them from human and sex trafficking, physical and sexual abuse, and exploitation.

In the case of unaccompanied migrant children, DHS/SSA has limited resources to support children and youth who are temporarily detained. These youth often are in the care of the federal government, and are served through a federal contract with the Office of Refugee Resettlement which provides shelter care services to undocumented minor youth.

## **The public-and private-sector programs and resources available to meet those needs**

DHS provides preventive in-home services and support to families. These supports are designed to promote the safety and well-being of children and their families, enhance a parent's ability to create a safe and stable home environment, and maintain permanency while preserving family unity. In-Home Services programs are designed to enable a child to remain safely at home while receiving intervention services. Ensuring the safety, well-being and permanence of children is paramount to child welfare practice throughout Maryland.

A child is only removed from their home environment if it is determined that their safety and well-being is compromised. In this instance, DHS is prepared to seek out an alternative safe and permanent place for youth to call home. Most recently with the enactment of SB 24, this provision has allowed DHS to expand our definition of kinship care to include fictive kin (kinship caregiver) as a family resource for our youth that are at risk for entering foster care or are in foster care. This broader definition includes those who have a strong emotional connection with a youth or family but without a blood or legal relationship, allowing the state to introduce formal kinship fictive kin to the court to include family members beyond the 5th degree of consanguinity to become kinship caregivers.

The DHS Ready By 21 (RB21) Initiative was created to coordinate efforts to secure financial and human resources to establish transitional services for youth to prepare them for young adulthood and ensure they have the opportunity to successfully transition out of foster care.

To guarantee that youth achieve successful outcomes as they prepare for adulthood, five key factors were recently revised and include:

- Education & Employment
- Permanent & Supportive Connections
- Safe & Stable Housing
- Well-Being & Civic Engagement
- Financial Empowerment

The RB21 Benchmarks is a resource tool used by youth, their caseworker, and supportive adult in designing their transitional plan. The newly revised RB21 Benchmarks are universal and have minimum expectations for all youth ages 14 to 21. The benchmarks provide opportunities for youth to have "normative" learning experiences that assist youth and their caseworker in identifying goals, creating tasks, and measuring outcomes for transitioning out of their foster care placement. Outcomes for achieving these benchmarks may be different for each youth due to their functionality, mental and physical capabilities. DHS continues to strive towards ensuring that all youth who leave their foster care placement are independent and successful adults. DHS has focused on education, employment and stable housing as a priority for youth exiting foster care.

### Stable Housing Initiatives

#### **THRIVE @ 25**

Thrive @ 25 initiative is a Children's Bureau-funded for youth at-risk of Homelessness Demonstration Grant focusing on youth in foster care on the Mid-Shore. The Institute for Innovation & Implementation at the University of Maryland, School of Social Work is the lead, partnering with DHS, the Mid-Shore Local Departments of Social Services

(Caroline, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne's, & Talbot Counties), and the National Center for Housing & Child Welfare. Thrive@ 25 is a three phase process. Phase I concentrated on gathering information on the targeted population. Thrive @ 25 is currently in Phase II (9/30/15 - 9/29/18). Phase II concentrates on model intervention. This intervention primarily focuses on enhancing the youth transition plan and ensuring the plan is guided by the youth.

### **SILA AND ILP**

DHS also has two placement options specific to independent housing for older youth in foster care. The purpose of these options is to prepare youth to sustain their housing once they exit foster care. Semi Independent Living Arrangements (SILA) are for youth approved to receive a monthly stipend from the LDSS to pay their rent and other necessary expenses. SILA is funded through the Chafee funds. The monthly stipend is the same as the public board and care rate issued to public resource providers. The second option is Independent Living Programs (ILPs). ILPs allow youth to reside in a program operated by a Private Contractor licensed as a Child Placement Agency that simulates independence. Youth placed in an ILP receive supportive services and supervision from staff to assist with self-sufficiency. It is worth noting that regardless of placement options the RB 21 goals and plans follow the youth during their out-of-home placement.

### **FUP VOUCHERS**

When youth exit care, DHS has secured partnerships to assist with housing options. DHS has partnered with Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) for the Family Unification Program (FUP). DHCD is the holder of the Housing Choice Vouchers. The vouchers cover rental payments. LDSS refers families and transitioning youth to DHCD. The Family Unification Program (FUP) is a program under which Housing Choice Vouchers (HCVs) are provided to two different populations:

1. Families for whom the lack of adequate housing is a primary factor in
  - a. The imminent placement of the family's child or children in out-of-home care,
  - Or
  - b. The delay in the discharge of the child or children to the family from out-of-home care.

There is no time limitation on FUP family vouchers.

2. Transitioning Foster Youth -Eligible youths who have attained at least 18 years of age and not more than 24 years of age and who have left foster care, or will leave foster care within 90 days. Once issued, youth are able to utilize the voucher for 36 months. In addition to rental assistance, supportive services are provided by DHCD to FUP youth. Examples of the skills targeted by these services include money management skills, job preparation, educational counseling, and proper nutrition and meal preparation.

## **New Futures Bridge Subsidy Program**

DHS, DHCD, and GOCCP collaborated to develop the **New Futures Bridge Program**. Participants receive this short-term tenant-based voucher rental assistance program 1 year of rental subsidy. Subsidized units are subject to housing Quality Standards (HQS) inspection. Qualified Individuals are victims of violence or youth aging out of Foster Care.

## **The gaps in public and private sector programs and resources available to meet the needs of unaccompanied homeless minors**

Current State regulations and DHS policy support services for youth up to their 21st birthday. Additional extended after care services are also available to youth up to their 23rd birthday. However, the availability of resources across the state varies depending on location and funding sources.

## **The barriers to access safe shelter for unaccompanied homeless minors**

Neglected youth who do not have a parent or guardian available to care for them are the responsibility of the LDSS. This is clearly defined in the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), which provides guidance to States about child protection, and who should intervene to provide supportive services to children who have been abused, neglected, or abandoned. The LDSS provides for the needs of this population, and currently the LDSS does not have any particular barriers to support these youth.

Youth who are neglected and do not have a parent or guardian or fictive kin available to care for them are the responsibility of the LDSS. Currently the LDSS does not have any particular barriers to support these youth.

**In addition to the above topics, we request that your agency or organization provide the following information by Friday, August 23rd to be included in the meeting materials:**

**All available funding sources, including federal, state, and local funds that your agency receives that can be used to serve unaccompanied homeless minors;**

The funds listed below can be utilized to support transitioning youth.

- Federal
  - John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood Grant

- Tuition Waiver & Education and Training Vouchers
- Title IV-B, Part 1
- Title IV-E
- State/LDSS
  - Flex funds
  - Special flex funds

**A description of all restrictions and allowable uses of these funding sources and grants**

- John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood
  - Youth in out-of-placement who are transitioning from care to independence (ages 14-21)
- Tuition Waiver
  - Youth who enter foster care on or after their 13th birthday and have been in care for at least one year consecutively, and have completed high school are eligible for this waiver. Additionally, siblings meeting the above requirement and is in a permanent placement with that sibling, is also eligible for the waiver.
  - The tuition waiver is available to eligible youth up until their 25th birthday and gives up to 10 years to complete post secondary higher education or vocational training.
- Education and Training Vouchers
  - Youth in foster care between 14-21 and
  - Youth who were adopted or entered kinship guardianship at age 16 years of age or were in a out-of home placement on their 18th birthday
  - Youth must apply before age 21 and can receive up to the age of 26 with a maximum of 5 years

**A list of grant awards distributed by your agency that are used to serve unaccompanied homeless minors**

Beyond the DHS budget allocations to LDSS, there are no other grant awards distributed by DHS that are used to serve unaccompanied homeless minors.

**If applicable, the statute or regulation that governs the administration of each funding source**

- John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood
  - 42 U.S. Code § 677. John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood

- IV-B, Part 1 - Stephanie Tubbs Jones Child Welfare Services
  - Funds are used to promote the welfare of children, prevent neglect, abuse or exploitation of children, support at risk families through services which allow children when appropriate to remain with their families or return to their families in a timely manner, promote safety, permanence and well being of children in foster care and adoptive families, and provide training professional development and support to ensure a well qualified workforce
- Title IV-E Foster Care
  - Funds are available for monthly maintenance payments for the daily care and supervision of eligible children; administrative costs to manage the program; training of staff and foster care providers; recruitment of foster parents and costs related to the design, implementation and operation of a statewide data collection system.
- Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA)
  - An Act to provide financial assistance for a demonstration program for the prevention, identification, and treatment of child abuse and neglect, to establish a National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, and for other purposes. 93rd (Congress 1973-1974)
- Foster Youth Savings Program
  - Provides mechanism for youth to acquire funds that support a successful transition into adulthood while acquiring savings to reinforce life skills learned to support housing, education, financial empowerment and career investments that lead to independence and self-sufficiency (Maryland General State Funds)