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August 25, 2020

The Honorable Andrew Cuomo  
State Capitol, Executive Chamber  
Albany, NY 12210

Dear Governor Cuomo,

CHAMPS-NY is a statewide coalition of advocates and providers working for policy and practice change to support children, families, and caregivers in child welfare. **As such, we implore you to sign S.8834/A.10581, sponsored by Senator Montgomery and Assembly Members Wright, Barrett, Jaffe, and Hevesi.** This measure, if enacted, would authorize children who have "aged out" of foster care to return to care without waiting for court approval during the COVID-19 state of emergency. This initiative, when coupled with earlier protocols published by the Office for Children and Families, will provide for a stronger safety net for young adults aging out of foster care during this pandemic.

As you are well aware, and responsive to, this pandemic presents significant and unique challenges for the thousands of children who have recently been discharged from foster care. During the best of times, children who "age out" of foster care do not perform as well as their peers in the most fundamental aspects of adult life. The statistics are well documented and overwhelming; when youth are discharged without the foundation of family, they face instability with regard to housing, income, and employment. The current pandemic has highlighted what happens to our youth who are not connected to permanent families: they have no one to fall back on during a crisis.

Another impact of this pandemic is that New York State is facing a severe fiscal crisis, increasing the likelihood that many youth aging out of foster care would have trouble finding employment, struggle with homelessness, and be forced to rely on adult welfare services. This is an opportunity for us to Build Back Better for children who have recently aged out of foster

care by ensuring every child is connected to a loving family. It is the better financial decision, but more importantly, it's the better decision for our youth. This urgent issue has gained much attention in the press as young adults tell their stories and advocates and lawyers for youth detail the ramifications of inaction. While New York has led the way in much of the pandemic response, we have been woefully behind the curve on this issue.

This legislation answers one population of youth in need. The other population is youth who are in foster care but nearing the age of 21, when children "age out" of care. In the middle of a global health pandemic, when safe, stable homes and families are key to both individual and public health, no young person should be pushed from their home or forced to leave foster care without a family simply because they turn 21. No child should age out of foster care without a permanent, committed family connection that lasts a lifetime--a comfort the rest of us take for granted. We will continue to support legislation that would establish a moratorium on aging out of foster care, allowing youth who need the continued support of foster care to stay in care during this crisis. Nine other states implemented protections for children in foster care, showing it is possible and will not break the bank.

**We urge you to continue building upon your response to youth aging out, and sign S.8834/A.10581 into law.** Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

The CHAMPS-NY Campaign & Lawyers For Children, Inc.