



Strengthen the Child Welfare Housing Subsidy

The Promise

When young people age out of foster care—that is, exit the system because they have reached adulthood (18 or older) or the age limit for foster care (21), they often do not have strong connections with family or other trusted adults. It is the responsibility of New York State to ensure these young people in the state's care are set up to transition smoothly into safe, affordable housing with supports readily available to ensure their success. So too, when families become involved in the child welfare system because of housing insecurity, the child welfare system should be able to quickly provide support to enable families to stay safely, together, in their home.

The child welfare housing subsidy provides \$725 a month to families involved in the child welfare system and young people aged 18-21 who have left foster care facing housing instability. The subsidy is intended to prevent separation of families who are involved in the child welfare system, expedite family reunification, and support youth transitioning out of foster care.¹ The subsidy can be used for a maximum of three years.

The Challenge

Each year, approximately 1,000 youth age out of foster care.² **As many as one-third of youth who age out of foster care experience homelessness, and many more experience unstable housing arrangements.** Families involved with the child welfare system often face housing instability, contributing to stress and increasing the possibility of family separation.

Homelessness and housing instability is at a crisis point in New York State. Youth and families involved in the child welfare system often lack family they can fall back on during difficult times. This subsidy could be especially helpful for eligible youth and families, as they can receive the subsidy in as quickly as two weeks, much faster than the months or years other assistance can take to determine eligibility or provide help. For young people, one barrier to utilization is that the subsidy is only available until they reach age 21. Because New York extends foster care until age 21, youth aging out of the system are unable to avail themselves of the benefit to assist them in their transition to independent living.

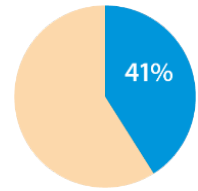
What We've Learned from People with Lived Experience

"It's midnight, you just turned 18 and the clock starts ticking. You don't know whether to be excited for another year on this planet or stressed out by a ton of negative emotions, knowing that your lifeline is about to be severed."

—Jeremiah Perez-Torres, foster youth advocate, doctoral student, and adjunct professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, excerpt from Opinion in City Limits

What We Know

Poverty and symptoms of poverty are one of the major drivers for most families' involvement in the child welfare system, often labeled "neglect."³ Homelessness and housing instability are among the poverty-related reasons families are reported to the State Central Register,⁴ and **housing is a major concern for 41% of youth who are aging out of the child welfare system.**⁵



Young people who exit the child welfare system to independence before the age of 21 are eligible for the subsidy when they have roommates, a positive change that was made in 2019. Youth exiting the child welfare system at 21 are ineligible for the housing subsidy when they need it most—as they are transitioning out of State support.

The housing subsidy is one of a menu of child welfare Preventive Services which include home visiting, child care, transportation, job training, and cash grants. In the 2023-24 New York State Budget, New York took the important step of increasing the child welfare housing subsidy for the first time since its creation (35 years ago), from \$300 to \$725. There remain several problems with these services, and the housing subsidy in particular, to address:

1. The State share of funding for Preventive Services (62%) is far below the original 75% State share for these services when the funding was established in 1980, leaving counties—many of which lack resources—to make up the difference.
2. Preventive Services, including the housing subsidy, are underutilized: most families that are separated do not receive Preventive Services before their children are removed from the home.
3. The child welfare housing subsidy is unavailable to youth who leave foster care at age 21 due to age limits imposed on preventive services funding.

Policy Solutions

To encourage wider use of preventive services generally, New York State should pay 75% share for preventive services as was originally appropriated for these services. In addition, the child welfare housing subsidy should be strengthened in two ways:

1. To ensure the subsidy remains large enough to be able to serve its purpose of stabilizing young people's and families' housing situation going forward, it must be indexed to inflation, so that it will rise with housing costs.
2. Provide the same support for young people leaving the child welfare system up to age 24, to provide a fallback during the first three years they enter independent life using non-preventive services funding. New York has a special responsibility to young people transitioning from the state's care to provide supports if they encounter challenges on the road to independence.

¹ New York State Office of Children and Family Services. September 9, 2020. Administrative Directive: Child Welfare Preventive Housing Subsidy. https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/policies/external/ocfs_2020/ADM/20-OCFS-ADM-16.pdf

² Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy. 2024. The State of New York's Children Data Book: January 2024. <https://scaany.org/our-priorities/state-of-nys-children/>

³ Children's Defense Fund. n.d. The Child Allowance is a Child Welfare Issue. <https://www.childrensdefense.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Child-Allowance-Child-Welfare-Talking-Points.pdf>

⁴ Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy. February 1, 2023. Child & Family Wellbeing Fund. https://scaany.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Child-Family-Wellbeing-Fund-One-pager_02012023.pdf

⁵ Fostering Youth Success Alliance. 2021. Moving Forward: A Post-Pandemic Blueprint for New York's Foster Youth. <https://readymag.com/fysa/movingforward/>