

# Congress of the United States

## Washington, DC 20515

April 16, 2020

Dear Governors:

As you respond to the COVID-19 crisis, we urge you to consider the needs of one of your states' most vulnerable populations: foster youth. We are concerned that transition-age foster youth are suffering serious social and economic hardship during this disaster -- from homelessness to food insecurity and a lack of healthcare. We encourage you to take advantage of all available resources to support these young people as you manage the COVID-19 situation in your states.

Approximately 18,000 youth exit foster care without a family each year, and, unfortunately, the outcomes for these young people are discouraging even in times of economic prosperity. Data indicate that on average, two in five foster youth who "age out" of care will experience episodes of homelessness and only 50 percent of youth will be employed at age 24. The COVID-19 crisis will only exacerbate these dire outcomes.

FosterClub, a national network for young people from foster care, conducted an online poll of 172 transition-age youth from March 21 through March 24. The results are very troubling:

- 28% of respondents described their home as having a food crisis or being very low on food
- 40% indicated that they had been forced to move or feared being forced to move
- 27% of respondents had been laid off and another 40% had had their hours severely cut
- 18% indicated they are in a money crisis and 33% stated they had less than a week's worth of cash on hand
- 23% said they wished they had more people to help them through the crisis, and
- 14% of respondents indicated that they are on their own, or almost entirely on their own

We are aware that many young people are suffering from financial hardship at this time. However, unlike their peers, many foster youth have no family or support network to turn to for help navigating these challenges. Thousands of foster youth in college have found themselves without housing or food as colleges and universities close dorms and dining halls for the semester. Still others are unable to afford the technology they need for telehealth consultations, and many foster youth are relying on "couch surfing" for housing, making them unable to shelter in place. This poses serious public health risks.

On March 27, President Trump signed the \$2 trillion CARES Act into law, providing emergency funding to states and communities to deal with the COVID-19 fallout. Among its provisions, the legislation included funding that can be used to support older foster youth: \$45 million for child welfare services under Title IV-B of the Social Security Act and \$1 billion for social services and emergency assistance through the Community Services Block Grants (CSBG). In the wake of the last recession, CSBG funds were used in innovative ways to support low-income youth with education, employment, and emergency assistance. States and Community Action Agencies have an opportunity to leverage these funds to support foster youth in the coming weeks. Furthermore, states must take the opportunity to use the additional flexibility provided by the 6.2 percent increase in the federal medical assistance percentage under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act to increase their support for activities that assist older foster youth.

We understand that there are many competing priorities for emergency funding, and we continue to advocate for targeted resources for older foster youth at the federal level. However, we urge you to use

those funds that have already been made available to address the housing, nutrition, healthcare, and counseling needs of older foster youth. We also encourage you to contact colleges and universities in your states about supporting students who are current and former foster youth.

Many of these young people have nowhere else to turn for support, and we must not forget them as we move forward. They deserve the same care and concern as their non-foster peers. Thank you for your leadership and consideration.

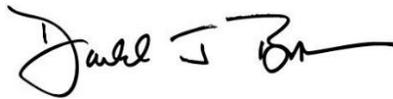
Sincerely,



**Jim Langevin**  
Member of Congress



**Karen Bass**  
Member of Congress



**Don Bacon**  
Member of Congress



**Brenda Lawrence**  
Member of Congress



**Paul Mitchell**  
Member of Congress