



SCHUBERT CENTER FOR CHILD STUDIES

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May 9, 2016

Electronically Submitted Written Proponent Testimony on HB 50/SB 240

Thank you Chairman Oelslager, Vice-Chair Coley, Ranking Minority Member Skindell, and Senate Finance Committee Members.

My name is Gabriella Celeste and I submit this testimony to you as an interested party in legislative matters concerning foster care and child well-being, specifically House Bill 50/ Senate Bill 240. The Schubert Center for Child Studies at Case Western Reserve University works to bridge research, education, policy, and practice for the well-being of children and adolescents. It is in this capacity, recognizing that foster youth require our collective support to help ensure their success in adulthood, that we encourage efforts to support youth in and transitioning out of foster care. House Bill 50/ Senate Bill 240 offers an important step by extending critical supports to foster youth who currently “age out” of the child welfare system at 18, up to age 21. The Schubert Center is part of the Ohio Fostering Connections coalition to promote HB 50. To learn more about the issues that youth face when aging out in Ohio, please visit the Ohio Fostering Connections website at www.ohiofosteringconnections.org.

Adolescence is a critical period of development between childhood and adulthood when young people begin to develop greater autonomy, establish emotional independence, and create goals for the future. Key developmental tasks – such as self-determination and decision-making, individuation and personal identity formation, navigating life milestones and transitions, making mistakes and learning from those experiences – help youth to become healthy adults.

Positive social connections are essential to healthy youth development; this support is even more imperative for young people who have experienced trauma. Without enduring reliable relationships, particularly with caring adults, children in foster care often lack the support needed to complete these developmental tasks.

Young people transitioning out of foster care are at significant risk of experiencing poor life outcomes. The evidence clearly suggests that young people in foster care experience worse outcomes than those not placed in foster care. For instance:

- 24.4% of foster care youth don't receive a high school diploma or GED versus 7.3% of the general population,
- 52% are unemployed versus 24.5% of general population,
- 81.2% of males have been arrested versus 17.4% of general population,
- 77% of females have been pregnant compared to 40.4% of general population.¹

Significant improved outcomes for young people and long term costs benefits are realized when youth are given the opportunity to remain in care or otherwise receive continued supportive services. According to the Midwest Evaluation, young people who remained in care until age 21 experienced better outcomes than those who had to leave care at age 18. For example, young people who continued to receive supportive foster care services through 21 were:

- twice as likely to be working or in school at age 19 than youth who exited care at 18,
- twice as likely to have completed at least one year of college by age 21,
- 38% less likely to experience pregnancy before age 21, and,
- more likely to access independent living services.

Finally, young people who exited foster care at 18 were 2.7 times more likely to have been homeless than those who continue to receive services until 21.²

Your support and action on HB 50/ SB 240 is needed to implement a proven approach that will provide foster youth the opportunity to more successfully navigate the transition to adulthood. Ohio has the opportunity to join 26 other states in successfully extending support to foster youth through age 21. Allowing youth more time to create strong connections is crucial for them to build the skills, supports and confidence necessary to make this transition. Extending services makes both social and fiscal sense. By extending supports for foster youth we will see more young people completing high school, vocational training and college, more people employed, lower healthcare costs, fewer incarcerations, and more young people connected to caring, strong social support networks.³

Thank you for your consideration and leadership on these important matters. Please contact me at mgc36@case.edu should you have any questions.

¹ Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. Foster Care to 21: Doing it Right. 2011. *Issue Brief #1*. Available Online at: <http://www.jimcaseyyouth.org/foster-care-21-doing-it-right>

² Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. Foster Care to 21: Doing it Right. 2011. *Issue Brief #1*. Available Online at: <http://www.jimcaseyyouth.org/foster-care-21-doing-it-right>

³ Ohio Fostering Connections: Expanding supports to foster youth through age 21. March 2015. Available online at <http://www.ohiofosteringconnections.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/OFC-Report-MARCH-2015-1.pdf>