

Education and Training Vouchers for Foster Youth

ACTION

- Provide \$60 million for Education and Training Vouchers (ETVs) for youth leaving foster care at age 18 and those adopted from foster care at age 16 or older.

HISTORY

Many youth lose the support they received in foster care when they turn 18. Without the support of a family, they are on their own to obtain further education and prepare for employment, health care, mental health care, and housing. The bleak reality is that an overwhelming number of older youth in foster care are ill prepared for the responsibilities of adulthood and do not have the opportunity to engage their strengths and talents. They encounter tremendous obstacles that put their emotional, economic, and personal security at risk. The absence of educational or emotional support may lead to further damage if they fall victim to violence, engage in substance abuse, or become parents before they are ready.

The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (P.L. 106-169) authorized the ETV program. Congress first provided funding at \$42 million in FY 2003. For fiscal years 2004 through 2006, the President requested \$60 million, yet Congress approved only \$46 million for each of these years. ETV funds are distributed to the states using the same formula as the Chafee Independent Living Program. Initial state activity has been strong, yet more youth in foster care and formerly in care could take advantage of the vouchers if they were fully funded and their availability was more widely known. On October 1, 2004, unused ETV funds from FY 2003 that states did not distribute to former youth in care were returned to the federal government.

Through the ETVs, youth who leave foster care at age 18, and those who are adopted from foster care at age 16 or older, have opportunities to realize their potential and gain the necessary skills and support networks that are already established for other youth. ETVs allow more opportunities for foster youth to attend vocational and technical schools, community colleges, and four-year universities that will provide opportunities previously not available.

KEY FACTS

- Recent data shows that approximately 93,800 children, ages 16 through 18, are in foster care and are potentially eligible for ETVs through adoption or emancipation.
- Most youth in foster care experience multiple placements. Some children experience seven or more placements before they leave foster care.
- Children in foster care are twice as likely as the rest of the population to drop out of high school.
- A 2004 study of youth exiting foster care revealed that they completed high school (via diploma or GED credentials) at rates similar to the general population; however, they used GED programs to complete high school at six times the rate of the general population.
- The same 2004 study showed that these youth experienced high rates of homelessness—22.2% reported being homeless for one or more days. These youth also lacked health insurance at almost twice the rate of the general population (33%).

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- Among youth that have recently aged out of foster care, 50% are unemployed, and 12% report having lived on the street or in a shelter at least one night since discharge.

Sources for statistical information are provided in the online version of this fact sheet. See www.cwla.org/advocacy/2006legagenda.htm.

C W L A C O N T A C T

Tim Briceland-Betts • 202/942-0256
bricebet@cwla.org