



# CHS PANEL OF EXPERTS POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In Virginia, over 400 youth age out of foster care each year. Each youth who ages out costs society an average of \$300,000 over the course of their lifetime.

Children's Home Society of Virginia and Better Housing Coalition led a panel of local, state and national experts to identify legislative and administrative policy recommendations to support those youth. These recommendations are rooted in research and best practices, promoting permanency and normalcy for youth in foster care and successful independence for youth who have aged out of foster care.

We believe that allocating adequate resources is a necessary investment in the lives of children and youth in foster care.



*In creating these policy recommendations, the panel focused on these core values:*

**YOUTH-FOCUSED:** Policy recommendations should be focused on the best interests of the youth and rooted in the youth voice.

**TRAUMA-INFORMED:** The panel recognized the intersection of trauma and foster care and believes all policy recommendations should be trauma-informed to promote resiliency.

**EQUITABLE:** The panel recognized that there are disparities for youth in foster care and youth aging out of foster care and all policy recommendations should be rooted in and promote equity.

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## I. General Recommendations

- A. The General Assembly should codify Fostering Futures.
- B. The General Assembly should increase the authority of Virginia Department of Social Services to assist Local Departments of Social Services and enforce guidance and compliance with state policies.
- C. The General Assembly should create a Commission focused on alternative methods of delivering social services and alternative Department of Social Services structures.
- D. The General Assembly should invest in stabilizing the child welfare workforce including funding to update the statewide training model.
- E. Virginia Department of Social Services should implement a statewide system to recruit and train foster parents.
- F. Virginia should increase statewide trauma-informed training for foster care workers and foster parents.
- G. Virginia Department of Social Services should create and implement a strategy to reduce the number of moves and length of time children remain in foster care.
- H. Virginia should create an independent Ombudsman Office to investigate complaints from the public regarding social services.
- I. Virginia should standardize transition and exit planning requirements.
- J. Virginia Department of Social Services should create a list of all waiting children and distribute that list quarterly to community partners and contract agencies.
- K. Virginia Department of Social Services and Local Departments of Social Services should collaboratively create and use a Bill of Rights for Foster Youth.
- L. Local Departments of Social Services should, upon any dissolution of an adoption, provide the option for the child to change their name back to their birth name.

<sup>1</sup> *Cost Avoidance: The Business Case for Investing in Youth Aging Out of Foster Care. Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative (2013). Available at: <http://aecf.org/resoures/cost-avoidance-the-business-case-for-investing-in-youth-aging-out-of-foster/>*



Children's Home Society of Virginia is a permanency-driven, trauma-informed organization. Our mission is to build strong permanent families and lifelong relationships for Virginia's at-risk children and youth.

We work with trauma-informed approaches in order to build better outcomes for youth who are in the foster care system and who have aged out of the foster care system without a permanent family.

We are here as a resource on issues relating to trauma, foster care, youth who have aged out of foster care and adoption.

## CONTACT

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# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

## II. Housing recommendations:

- A. When youth turn 18, if they elect to continue receiving supportive services, Virginia Department of Social Services should provide the cost of housing over a graduated period to assist youth in learning to budget and pay housing costs.
- B. Virginia and localities should prioritize affordable housing for youth who have aged out of foster care.
- C. Virginia colleges should arrange housing during breaks for youth who have aged out of foster care.

## III. Healthcare and Mental Health Recommendations:

- A. Virginia Department of Social Services and Department of Medical Assistance Services should work closely and collaboratively with the Foster Care Director of Health and Safety to efficiently deliver health and mental healthcare services to children in foster care and youth who have aged out of foster care.
- B. Local Departments of Social Services should be required to provide in depth education of eligibility for Medicaid.
- C. Virginia should provide automatic re-enrollment in Medicaid for youth who aged out of foster care from age 18 until age 26.
- D. Virginia should require ongoing best practices and trauma-informed trainings for all individuals involved with youth in foster care.
- E. The General Assembly and Virginia Department of Social Services should require Local Departments of Social Services to allow youth to continue with the same healthcare providers throughout their time in foster care, as long as feasible and in accordance with the best interests of the child.
- F. The General Assembly should create a Commission to focus on methods to increase the number of Medicaid providers in Virginia, with a focus on psychologists and therapists.
- G. Local Departments of Social Services should be required to provide mental health training to all foster and adoptive parents.

## IV. Employment and Workforce Development

- A. The General Assembly should ask the Commission on Youth to identify workforce development issues and solutions for youth aging out of foster care.
- B. The trauma-informed community networks should create and train a network of trauma-informed employers.
- C. Community partners and employers should carve out employment opportunities for youth who have aged out of foster care.
- D. The General Assembly should pass legislation from the 2019 Commission on Youth recommendations relating to driver's licenses.



**Better Housing**  
COALITION

The Better Housing Coalition is the Richmond region's largest nonprofit community development corporation. BHC works to ensure that every citizen in the Richmond region, regardless of their economic status, has good choices in where they live, and opportunities to reach their fullest potential.

Please visit  
[betterhousingcoalition.org](http://betterhousingcoalition.org)  
for additional information.

## V. Financial Capabilities Recommendations

- A. Local Departments of Social Services should promote the use of financial tools, such as prepaid credit cards, and partner with financial institutions to promote financial literacy and allow youth to build credit.
- B. Virginia Department of Social Services should explore a partnership with the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative Passport Program and partnerships with banks or other community organizations to provide financial literacy classes.

## VI. Education Recommendations

- A. Local Departments of Social Services, the Department of Education and local school systems should ensure youth can remain in the same school throughout their time in foster care as long as they are in the same school system.
- B. Local Departments of Social Services, the Department of Education and local school systems should encourage, when appropriate, youth transferring from alternative schools into non-alternative schools.
- C. Department of Education, Virginia Department of Social Services and local school systems should work together to ensure youth aging out of foster care either graduate high school or obtain a GED and work with the Community College System to allow youth to simultaneously obtain a vocational certificate.
- D. Local Departments of Social Services and local school systems should identify the best graduation options for youth in foster care, discourage the unnecessary use of Applied Studies diplomas and standardize a disclosure for youth when Applied Studies diplomas are appropriate.
- E. The General Assembly should support the implementation of Family First Prevention Services Act including increasing the age limit by which youth must access Education and Training Vouchers to age 26.
- F. Local Departments of Social Services should provide youth all necessary and appropriate documentation prior to exiting foster care and retain a copy for 5 years.

## VII. Permanency Recommendations

- A. Virginia should support implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act.
- B. The General Assembly should provide an enforcement mechanism to allow Virginia Department of Social Services to enforce Concurrent Planning for Independent Living and Permanency.
- C. Virginia Department of Social Services and Local Departments of Social Services should increase recruitment of adoptive families.
- D. Local Departments of Social Services should increase family finding searches to find family members able to care permanently for children and youth in foster care and use evidence-based models.
- E. Local Departments of Social Services should continue searching for permanent relationships for youth in the Fostering Futures program.
- F. Local Departments of Social Services should prioritize sibling connections.

