



STRENGTHENING THE VOICES  
OF CASA STATEWIDE

# HB 2963 & SB 1059: IMPROVING HEALTH OUTCOMES FOR YOUNG ADULTS FORMERLY IN FOSTER CARE

## BACKGROUND

Youth who age out of foster care face enormous challenges, often including lack of supportive relationships, educational deficits, employment and income challenges, inadequate housing, health problems and no health insurance. On average, 1,200 youth age out of foster care in Texas each year. These young adults also often have significantly higher medical and mental health care needs than their peers. In Texas alone, well over 50 percent of youth in foster care have been diagnosed with a mental illness.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, youth who age out of the Texas foster care system rarely receive the mental health services they need, because of the difficulty they face with renewing their health care coverage. The Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study revealed that **only 47 percent of foster care alumni managed to maintain health insurance after they exited foster care.**<sup>2</sup>

Under federal law, youth who age out of foster care are eligible for Medicaid coverage up to age 26 through the Former Foster Care Children (FFCC) program. To qualify, individuals must have been under state conservatorship when they exited foster care. Texas provides these young adults with coverage by automatically enrolling them when they leave care. However, **many experience a disruption in coverage because they have difficulty renewing their benefits annually with the state.** One reason youth formerly in foster care experience challenges renewing their benefits is because they are required to proactively update their mailing address with HHSC. This is difficult because they tend to be transient, and often do not know how to update their address with HHSC. If they do receive the renewal documents, they often find them confusing and complicated, which may lead to them being incorrectly completed. Failure to submit these renewal documents annually may lead to a gap or complete loss of health care coverage.

During the 86<sup>th</sup> Legislature, Texas CASA supported legislation (SB 2110) that would direct HHSC to create a redetermination or self-attestation process similar to the one now used for

<sup>1</sup> Tex. Health & Human Services Commission, Open Records Request for Foster Youth with Substance Use Disorder or Mental Illness (received 2019)

<sup>2</sup> Pecora PJ, Williams J, Kessler RC, Hiripie E, O'Brien K. Assessing the educational achievements of adults who were formerly placed in family foster care. *Child Fam Soc Work.* 2006;11(3):220–231



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the Healthy Texas Women's Health program. Expanding this process to the youth who were formerly in foster care would help prevent any disruption in services, treatment or medication they need after leaving the state's conservatorship. Importantly, the bill prohibited the state from renewing coverage for a youth formerly in foster care if the state determines that they are already receiving benefits in another state. The legislation had bipartisan support, but failed to receive a hearing during the 2019 Legislative Session.

### BY THE NUMBERS:

- ✂ As of December 2019, 4,565 youth were enrolled in the FFCC program.<sup>3</sup>
- ✂ In FY 2019, a total of 1,212 youth aged out of foster care at age 18.<sup>4</sup>
- ✂ In FY 2019, 220 youth lost their health coverage because the state could not locate them.<sup>5</sup>
- ✂ in FY 2019, 729 youth were denied coverage before aging out of the program at age 26

Creating an auto-renewal process for youth formerly in care would have a cost-savings benefit to the state by keeping these young adults covered in addition to potentially reducing uncompensated care costs to counties. Streamlining this process also saves the state both time and money, by eliminating the need for confusing renewal forms and specialized staff to assist these youth with renewing or recertifying their coverage. **Implementing this process should yield no additional cost to the state, since youth who age out of foster care are already granted health coverage and would not be receiving any additional benefits because of this bill.**

Ensuring sustained and long-term medical and mental health care coverage for these young adults will allow them to meet their individual health care needs as independent adults. Additionally, it will allow them to explore educational and workforce opportunities without feeling uncertain about how to cover the cost of potential medical expenses.

### Questions?

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<sup>3</sup> Tex. Health & Human Services Commission., Report on Medicaid Coverage for Former Foster Children. (2020)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/About\\_DFPS/Data\\_Book/Child\\_Protective\\_Services/Conservatorship/Exits.asp](https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/About_DFPS/Data_Book/Child_Protective_Services/Conservatorship/Exits.asp)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/About\\_DFPS/Data\\_Book/Child\\_Protective\\_Services/Conservatorship/Exits.asp](https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/About_DFPS/Data_Book/Child_Protective_Services/Conservatorship/Exits.asp)

<sup>5</sup> Tex. Health & Human Services Commission., Report on Medicaid Coverage for Former Foster Children. (2020)