

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

The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (P.L. 106-169) authorized the ETV program. Congress provided funding of \$42 million for the first time in FY 2003. Funding was increased to \$44.7 million for FY 2004 and \$46.6 million for FY 2005. For each of these years, the President requested \$60 million in his budget.

The voucher program is a component of the Chafee Independent Living Program, which helps older youth leaving foster care get the higher education, vocational training, and other education supports they need to move to self-sufficiency. Up to \$5,000 per year is available to a young person for the cost of attending college or vocational school.

ETV funds are distributed to the states using the same formula as the Chafee Independent Living Program. Although states generally are doing a good job of distributing these funds, more youth in foster care and formerly in care could take advantage of the vouchers if their availability were more widely known. On October 1, 2004, unused ETV funds from FY 2003 that states did not distribute to former foster youth were returned to the federal government.

Many older foster 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 preparation for employment, as well as health care, mental health care, and housing. Youth formerly in care have many strengths and talents and the desire to succeed, but the bleak reality is that an overwhelming number are ill-prepared for the responsibilities of adulthood. They encounter tremendous obstacles that put their emotional, economic, and personal security at risk. They may, for example, fall victim to violence or become parents before they are ready.

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 dreams and help them become America's next doctors and lawyers, plumbers and electricians, engineers, teachers, and truck drivers. These youth are our future, and ETVs will help them attend vocational and technical schools, community colleges, and four-year universities.

KEY FACTS

- Some 19,000 young people left foster care in 2001 at their 18th birthdays.
- Approximately 100,000 youth in foster care are 16 or older.
- Children in foster care are twice as likely as the rest of the population to drop out before finishing high school.
- Among youth who have recently aged out of foster care, 50% are unemployed. Among these youth, 12% report having lived on the street or in a shelter at least one night since discharge.
- One to two years of community college coursework significantly increases the likelihood of economic self-sufficiency.
- A college degree is the single greatest factor in determining access to better job opportunities and higher earnings.

Sources for statistical information are provided in the online version of this fact sheet. See www.cwla.org/advocacy/2005legagenda.htm.

CWLA CONTACT

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



440 First Street NW, Third Floor • Washington, DC 20001-2085