

**Fostering Youth Success Alliance - Children's Aid
Prepared for Submission to the Joint Legislative Public Hearing
On the FY 2021 Executive Budget Proposal
Higher Education**

Tuesday, February 4, 2020

This testimony is being submitted on behalf of the statewide Fostering Youth Success Alliance (FYSA). We would like to thank Chair Toby Ann Stavisky of the New York State Senate, Chair Deborah Glick of the New York State Assembly, and the honorable members of the Committees on Higher Education, Senate Finance and Assembly Ways & Means for the opportunity to provide feedback about the 2020-21 executive budget proposal. This testimony seeks to address funding for the **Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYCSI)**. First established in the 2015-16 budget, FYCSI aims to bridge the gap from foster care to college success, for the state's most vulnerable youth. **There are currently four cohorts of 975 students, who are on the path to college success, participating in FYCSI on over 100 public and private colleges and universities across New York State. Since its inception in 2015, the program has served over 1,500 students.** In FY2020-21 we anticipate over 1,200 youth with a foster care background to access FYCSI funding.

FYSA is a statewide advocacy group that promotes responsive policy and programs to improve the socioeconomic, physical and mental health, housing, and educational outcomes for youth in and aging out of foster care. The alliance is comprised of concerned providers, activists, and youth who are committed to securing stabilizing supports that empower youth across New York to overcome barriers and excel in life. FYSA is housed at and managed by Children's Aid, a multi-service human services organization located in New York City.

We are happy \$6 million in funding for FYCSI was included in Governor Cuomo's executive budget proposal, however there is still a need for further support. Our total ask for FY2020-21 is \$7.5 million. Between FY2018-19 and FY2019-20 the number of students accessing FYCSI has more than doubled, but FYCSI funding has remained the same. In order to keep pace with the growth of the program, FYSA is requesting an additional \$1.5 million. Without this additional funding, students relying on FYCSI support next school year will on average receive over \$1,000 less than they did in the previous year. These funds are used to cover students' expenses such as tuition, housing, transportation, and personal expenses, and are crucial to allowing students to get to and through college.

Youth in Foster Care in New York State

In New York State there are approximately 16,000 children and youth in foster care, of which 35% are 16 and above and will eventually age out of the foster care system. However, many youth leave care without the support of a caring adult or family, and when barriers or emergencies arise, many don't have savings, relatives, or friends to rely on.

For any youth seeking to go to college, the application and financial aid processes are often daunting tasks, but for youth in the foster care system and those who have aged out of care, those undertakings might seem like insurmountable obstacles. Many lack supportive adults to help navigate confusing applications and processes before they must make life altering decisions. And the financial burden of school often makes attending college feel impossible.

A college degree is a recognized pathway out of poverty and can help youth make a successful transition to independence. **Since the FYSCI program was established by the state in April 2015, \$21 million for this program has been allocated. For the 2019-20 budget, the state invested \$6 million to support 975 students (four cohorts) attending college at 100 institutions statewide at City University of New York (CUNY), State University of New York (SUNY), and private colleges.**

Because foster youth face huge gaps in resources, funding from this initiative is needed to help youth meet basic needs, such as housing, books, transportation, food, and personal care. Colleges and universities statewide, are also able to provide increased academic and supportive services on campuses which are equally important to help youth in care persist in college. By removing financial barriers and providing a robust infrastructure of supports, foster youth now have the opportunity to focus more intently on their academics. Maurice, a FYSA Student Advocate and recipient of the college initiative funding says "Thanks to FYSCI, which has helped cover certain expenses while in school, I feel relieved of stress. It has allowed me to focus and work harder than I ever have before, in order to get where I want to be!"

For youth in care with limited resources, work experience, and skills, obtaining a college degree is a sure way to help gain employment with a livable wage and to achieve self-sufficiency. According to the 2015 Bridging the Gap report, by graduating just one cohort of 375 students, the state can save approximately \$19 million, representing increased tax payments, and a decrease in public expenditures in health care, food stamps benefits, and shelters. FYSA Youth Advocate and past recipient of the college initiative funding says "FYSCI provided the financial support to achieve a BA in political science and begin working towards a Master's. I'm already putting all that I've learned into practice as a Business Immigration Analyst at a top tier law firm, and look forward to continuing my advocacy efforts for foster youth throughout my career!"

Making College Success a Reality

For the past five years, the state has devoted a total of \$21 million in resources to support foster youth in obtaining a college degree. Now is the time to redouble our commitment to the foster youth under our care. Therefore, we urge the state to take the next steps:

1. ***Full funding of \$7.5 million for the Foster Youth College Success Initiative:*** New York State has an obligation to ensure that youth in foster care can make the transition to independence. The Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) data from the 2017-18 academic year indicates that there were nearly 3,000 current or former foster youth attending college full time¹. However, the FYCSI program has been able to serve about one third of students in need of these supports.

To ensure continued success, we request that the state **allocate \$7.5 million to FYCSI in the final enacted FY 2021 state budget. This funding will be used to continue to support students from across the City University of New York, State University of New York and the independent college and university systems.**

2. ***Modify the Funding Distribution Process:*** We recommend that the statutory language be modified to allow the funds to be allocated to each sector based on the actual total number of foster youth attending those sectors. This will ensure that the release of FYCSI funds coincide with the packaging of financial aid for foster youth attending college. Changing how the funding is distributed will allow for the money to flow more quickly, but also take into account any year-to-year fluctuations that may occur.
3. ***Clarify the list of Eligible Services:*** FYSA requests that the definition of eligible services be expanded to ensure that housing during the summer and intersession breaks, as well as medical, vision, dental, and behavioral health services be included as covered expenses.

Conclusion

Foster youth face so much uncertainty in their lives, that having continuous financial, academic and other supports while in school is absolutely necessary to ensuring youth obtain a college degree. The state cannot abandon its responsibility at such a critical time of transition. **We must work together to make sure all students already in the college pipeline can continue on. As such, we are requesting \$7.5 million be allocated in the final enacted FY 2021 budget.** By doing so, the state will be providing a pathway for foster youth, currently in the care of the state and who are projected to enter in the fall, will have a fighting chance at succeeding in college. By championing FYCSI, the state is making a commitment to all foster youth, who come into the care of the state and want to attend college, are able to further their education and become independent, productive members of society. We know that if youth in foster care are provided opportunities to develop skills and access resources, they can and will succeed.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the 16,000 children and youth in foster care in New York State. If you have any questions regarding this submitted testimony, please

¹ New York State Higher Education Services Corporation data accessed by foil request, September 2018.

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