



Fostering Youth Success Alliance
Prepared for Submission to the Joint Legislative Public Hearing
On the FY 2023 Executive Budget Proposal
February 7, 2022

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 2022- 23 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 close to 1000 students, who are on the path to college success, participating in FYCSI across more than 100 public and private colleges and universities throughout New York State. Since its inception in 2015, the program has served over 2,000 individual students. In the FY2022-23 we anticipate over 1,200 youth with a foster care background will 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 foster care 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.

To date the state has invested \$34.2 million towards the college initiative to support the educational goals of young people with a foster care background. We were ecstatic to see that Governor Hochul’s Executive Budget proposal for FY2022-23 increased the FYCSI funding amount by ten percent to a total of \$7.92 million and we ask the legislature to continue its support of FYCSI by maintaining this funding level. This funding has had tremendous impact for young people with a foster care background as they continue to persist in their education throughout the pandemic.

FYCSI funds have and continue to allow students to cover expenses such as tuition, housing, transportation, medical and personal expenses. Ellenie, a current sophomore at SUNY Buffalo,

noted that FYCSI funding, “... makes the difference between being able to have one meal or two meals each day.” FYCSI funding allows young people to know their basic needs are taken care of so that they can stay focused on their education.

Youth in Foster Care in New York State

In New York State there are over 15,000 children and youth in foster care¹, many of whom will eventually age out of the foster care system. However, many youth with a foster care background 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 process can be daunting from before even reaching the classroom. The application and financial aid processes alone can be overwhelming hurdles for young people with a foster care background who lack support networks to help them make sense of these confusing processes. When faced with the cost of a college education, this well recognized pathway out of poverty can seem inaccessible to many students with a foster care background.

Since the FYCSI program was established by the state in 2015, this funding has helped young people to account for the gaps that other financial aid resources do not always accommodate. It opens the door to college that may otherwise seem impossible to accomplish. FYSA Advocate, Nichole, a 2021 BSW graduate of SUNY Fredonia and recipient of the college initiative funding says “It [FYCSI] was the only reason I could go at all,” when speaking to how she was able to afford her degree. As previously mentioned, young people are able to use FYCSI funding to cover basic needs, such as housing, books, transportation, food and personal care. Additionally, colleges are able to provide increased support services (coaching, mental health, etc.) to young people who may not otherwise have a support system to persist through college.

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 shelters².

Moving Forward: A Post-Pandemic Blueprint for New York’s Foster Youth

As the pandemic has caused disruption and instability for us all, it has had particular impact on young people with a foster care background, however they have been resilient and continued on

¹ <https://scaany.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/SONYC-Data-Book-2022.pdf>

² https://www.fysany.org/sites/default/files/document/bridging_the_gap.pdf

in their education throughout the pandemic. When FYSA [surveyed](#) over 200 young people with a foster care background in New York state, ages 8-26, on their experiences throughout the pandemic, it was found that nearly 1 in 4 of surveyed youth were concerned about the fear of or reality of housing instability. For some, college acts as temporary housing, but this option has not always been accessible during the pandemic. For some young people accessing FYCSI, they were able to use FYCSI to cover housing expenses so that they could continue on with their education. As one FYSA Advocate shared, "FYCSI allowed me to pay my rent so I wouldn't have to drop out. I can now say that I am in my graduating semester at SUNY Schenectady."

In general, we know that supportive funding programs increase the odds of young people with a foster care background accomplishing their degrees. In Texas, it was found that the 60% of eligible foster youth who accessed the state's fee waiver were 3.5 times more likely to receive a bachelor's degree than the students who did not, controlling for waiver eligibility, demographic characteristics, and academic performance³. This has continued to ring true during the pandemic as well: support programs such as FYCSI, were and continue to be vital in helping students to navigate the obstacles they faced - 83% of the students who reported continuing on in college through the pandemic, stated that they were actively participating in college support programs such as FYCSI. Additionally, a survey conducted by John Burton Advocates for Youth (JBAY) found that students with a foster care background who accessed basic needs centers on their college campuses were more likely to persist in college than their peers who did not.⁴

Making College Success a Reality

For the past seven years, the state has devoted a total of \$34.2 million in resources to support youth with a foster care background in obtaining their college degree. It is essential that New York State upholds this commitment as we all search for a way to move forward from the pandemic. The Governor's increase to \$7.92 million for the Foster Youth College Success Initiative will allow New York State to fulfill its obligation to support foster youth's successful transition to independence. As the acting parent for foster youth, New York State is responsible for ensuring that all young people have the resources necessary to pursue a college degree. In addition to the investment of funds, it is also important FYCSI funds be easily accessible for youth to access.

Through the Making College Success working group that includes partners from the Higher Education Services Corporation, State Education Department, Office of Children and Family Services, Administration for Children's Services, SUNY, and CUNY that FYSA convenes monthly, changes were secured to the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) application that ensure young people can more easily disclose their foster care background at the time of applying for financial

³ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0190740920309506?via%3Dihub>

⁴ <https://jbay.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/JBAY-COVID-19-Impact.pdf>

aid. FYSA estimates that the change to the TAP application may increase access to the program by 400 to 500 youth with a foster care background beginning in September 2022.

Conclusion

At a time when we are all faced with increased levels of uncertainty, it is necessary that we strengthen the resources that help us work towards stability. For young people with a foster care background, having continuous financial, mental health and other supports allows them to persist in their college education even in the face of unforeseen circumstances. New York State must continue to honor its obligation to support its most vulnerable community members on their path to independence. We must work collaboratively to ensure that all students are able to access a college education. We support the Governor's increase to FYCSI and would also recommend additional funding be allocated to the program to start to meet the increased need now that NYS has made it easier to identify eligible youth. By championing FYCSI, the state is ensuring that 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, and make their unique impact on society.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the over 15,000 children and youth in foster care in New York State. If you have any questions regarding this testimony, please contact Deidra Nesbeth, Director of the Fostering Youth Success Alliance at dnesbeth@childrensaidnyc.org or (646) 477-4322.