



# **FROM INTENTION TO IMPACT: A SUMMARY AND REVIEW OF POLICY RESPONSES TO THE NEEDS OF TRANSITION AGE YOUTH IN GEORGIA'S FOSTER CARE SYSTEM**

BARTON CHILD LAW & POLICY CENTER | DECEMBER 2023

## **OVERVIEW**

Research shows that older youth who are in and transitioning out of foster care face specific, known, and increased risk for negative life outcomes. These youth are more likely to experience adversity in critical life domains including education, health care, and housing stability compared with youth not in foster care.<sup>1</sup> In response, Congress has enacted dozens of comprehensive federal child welfare laws over the past half century. The most pertinent federal statutory schemes aimed at creating positive outcomes for transition age youth<sup>2</sup> focus on stabilizing their lives and setting the course for their future by promoting educational stability, expanding access to health care, and fostering the development of life skills to support self-sufficiency.

Despite decades of efforts and dozens of policy mandates, however, there is still little foundation for clearly understood or consistent state policy enforcement. In Georgia, approximately 12 percent of youth “age-out” of foster care each year.<sup>3</sup> In the most recent data set, 591 youth were recorded as having exited foster care to “emancipation,” meaning that they left the protection of state custody without the legal and emotional security of permanent family relationships.<sup>4</sup> To better understand the experience of transition age youth in Georgia, the Barton Child Law and Policy Center at Emory University School of Law (Barton Center) set out to document the primary federal child welfare laws strategically targeting outcomes for transition age youth and the Georgia laws and Georgia Division of Family and Children Services

(DFCS) policies enacted to implement those laws. Then, to provide context for a deeper understanding of policy impact, the Barton Center partnered with Georgia EmpowerMENT to administer a survey to a sample of thirty-eight youth with current and former foster care experience and conducted two separate, semi-structured focus groups with older youth. This policy brief presents both the summary of relevant laws and policies and a summary of the insights gathered from system-impacted youth.

Across the survey and focus groups, participating youth report a very limited familiarity with, or understanding of, the policies intended to serve the needs of transition age youth. According to the responses gathered, this lack of familiarity is commonly attributed to the high rates of caseworker turnover and the pervasive issues youth face in accessing meaningful case management services. Responses from participating youth further demonstrate a common belief that many of the policies and initiatives fail to address factors transition age youth feel are most important to their future success. To this end, the expressed desire of young people to influence the policymaking process by engaging directly with policymakers emerged as a prominent theme in both the survey and focus groups.

Based on the findings from the survey and focus groups, the apparent disconnect in policy and intent and the experience of participating transition age youth can be explained generally by: (1) insufficient investments to support meaningful implementation of federal policies; (2) lack of alignment between policies, resources, and practice strategies; and a (3) lack of meaningful engagement of youth in the development of policies and practice strategies intended to promote successful outcomes.

## OBJECTIVE

As transition age youth continue to comprise a substantial percentage of the overall foster care population in Georgia, stakeholders will need to be prepared to (1) fully understand the critical areas of policy that establish Georgia's responsibilities to youth in care, (2) appreciate the negative effects of ongoing workforce and staffing deficiencies as relates to policy implementation, and (3) consider the impact of those policies through ongoing assessment of the outcomes achieved for children and youth in care. The aim of this brief is to provide a basis for shared understanding of the policy levers available at the federal and state levels by documenting the current policy landscape and offering insight into areas for further development, ultimately intending to serve as a tool for education, research, advocacy, and capacity-building.

## QUICK REFERENCE: OVERVIEW OF FEDERAL & STATE ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR TRANSITION AGE YOUTH POLICY & PROGRAM BENEFITS

	Federal	Georgia
<b>LIFE SKILLS</b>	<p>The Foster Care Independence Act left discretion to states to develop objective criteria to determine eligibility for services and benefits made available through their programs. Generally, states can claim federal funding for Chafee program activities on behalf of youth who are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In foster care at age 14 or older and</li> <li>• Under age 23 (if the state already extends foster care services up to age 21)</li> </ul> <p>For states to claim federal funds for youth/young adults in their care after the age of 18, the recipient youth must be Title IV-E eligible and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completing secondary education or in an equivalent program,</li> <li>• Enrolled in a post-secondary or vocational institution,</li> <li>• Participating in an employment program or activity,</li> <li>• Employed for at least 80 hours/month, or</li> <li>• Unable to participate in the former activities due to a medical condition.</li> </ul>	<p>Georgia's Independent Living Program is named GA/RYS (Georgia Resilient. Youth-Centered. Stable. Empowered).</p> <p>All youth/young adults ages 14-21 are eligible for the Independent Living Program (ILP) so long as the youth:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has been adjudicated dependent or a child in need of services (CHINS) by a Georgia juvenile court;</li> <li>• Is or was in foster care for at least six months prior to reaching the age of 18; and</li> <li>• (For young adults age 18-21), is a citizen or permanent legal resident of the U.S. and a legal resident of Georgia.</li> </ul> <p>Youth who are incarcerated may still be eligible for ILP services.</p> <p>Extended foster care services are provided through Extended Youth Support Services (EYSS) for young adults ages 18-21 who are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completing secondary education or a program resulting in an equivalent credential,</li> <li>• Enrolled in an institution and pursuing postsecondary or vocational education,</li> <li>• Participating in a program or activity designed to promote or remove barriers to employment,</li> <li>• Employed for at least 120 hours a month,</li> <li>• Employed for 80 hours per month given that they are also engaged in one of the prior activities,</li> <li>• Or unable to do any of the prior activities due to a documented medical condition.</li> </ul> <p>The youth/young adult must also consent to services by signing a voluntary placement agreement with DFCS within a year of turning 21.</p>

<p><b>EDUCATION</b></p>	<p>Education and Training Vouchers (ETVs) are available to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth otherwise eligible for services under the state Chafee program;</li> <li>Youth adopted from foster care after turning age 16; and</li> <li>Young adults ages 21-23, if the recipient is enrolled in a postsecondary education or training program and are actively progressing toward completing the program).</li> </ul> <p>Youth who leave foster care for kinship guardianship at 16 or older are eligible to receive ETVs.</p> <p>Youth may receive ETV funds until age 26 but may only receive them for a total of five years.</p>	<p>To receive ETVs students must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meet ILP eligibility requirements;</li> <li>Be between age 18 and 21 and participating in the Extended Youth Support Services (EYSS) program;</li> <li>Be between age 18 and 23 and not participating in the EYSS program;</li> <li>Have been adopted from foster care after their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday; or</li> <li>Attend an accredited postsecondary educational institution.</li> </ul> <p>Youth who leave foster care for kinship guardianship at 16 or older are eligible to receive ETVs.</p> <p>Youth are eligible for ETV support until the age of 25, and eligibility is capped at five years.</p>
<p><b>HEALTH CARE</b></p>	<p>All youth who were in foster care on their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and are under age 21 are eligible for Chafee Medicaid if the state in which they reside takes advantage of the Medicaid option.</p> <p>States are given broad discretion to determine which youth are eligible to receive extended Medicaid. States can provide Medicaid to all youth who are eligible under the Foster Care Independence Act or limit to narrowed “reasonable categories” of youth that fall within the federally eligible group.</p> <p>All youth who were in foster care while enrolled in their current state’s Medicaid plan on their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and are under age 26 are eligible for continued Medicaid coverage.</p>	<p>Having adopted the Chafee Medicaid option, Georgia’s eligibility requirements are:</p> <p>Age:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The youth/young adult must have been in foster care (in any state) on their 18<sup>th</sup>, and</li> <li>Must be under 21-years-old for Chafee Independence Program Medicaid; or</li> <li>Must be under 26-years-old for Former Foster Care Medicaid.</li> </ul> <p>Enumeration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The youth/young adult must have a Social Security Number or applied for one.</li> </ul> <p>Residency:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The youth/young adult must be a Georgia resident.</li> </ul>

<p><b>HOUSING</b></p>	<p>Youth who are eligible for FUP housing vouchers are those who are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Between ages 18-24 (before reaching age 25),</li> <li>• Former foster youth or exiting care in the next 90 days, and</li> <li>• Homeless or at risk of becoming homeless at age 16 or older.</li> </ul>	<p>Eligibility beyond federal requirements is determined on a local level.</p>
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# THE FOSTER CARE INDEPENDENCE ACT OF 1999 (FCIA)/CHAFEE FOSTER CARE PROGRAM FOR SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD (CHAFEE PROGRAM)

## GENERAL POLICY

The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (FCIA) is the principal piece of federal legislation addressing the needs of transition age youth. The act amended Title IV-E of the Social Security Act to provide funding to assist youth currently and formerly in foster care to become self-sufficient adults.<sup>5</sup> In furtherance of this purpose, the FCIA established the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, which was later renamed and is known today as the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee Program). States have broad discretion to use Chafee Program funds to support strategies to improve education and employment outcomes for transition age youth. Adopting a developmental approach, the Chafee Program authorizes states to create programs as they see fit to support those in K-12, postsecondary, vocational education, or those seeking employment, specifically to:

- Identify youth likely to age-out of foster care and “help them transition to self-sufficiency by providing services such as assistance with obtaining a high school diploma, career exploration, vocational training, job placement and retention, training in daily living skills, training in budgeting and financial management skills, substance abuse prevention, and preventive health activities”;
- Help youth who are likely to stay in care until 18 obtain employment by providing training, education, and other services;
- Help youth prepare for and enter postsecondary training and education;
- “...provide emotional and personal support” to youth aging out of foster care by fostering relationships with mentors and other committed adults;
- “...provide financial, housing, counseling, employment, education, and other appropriate support and services” to young adults between the ages of 18-21 who were formerly in foster care, to support their transition to adulthood and self-sufficiency.<sup>6</sup>

The FCIA also creates the Education and Training Voucher program (ETV), which provides \$5,000 annually or the cost of attendance (whichever is less) to offset the costs of tuition, fees, books, supplies, transportation, and childcare for eligible youth to attend an institution of higher education.<sup>7</sup> The lifetime maximum for these benefits is five years, or until the recipient’s

twenty-sixth birthday, provided the recipient is making satisfactory progress toward completion of an education program.<sup>8</sup>

## LIFE SKILLS

FCIA requires older children in foster care to be enrolled in an Independent Living Program designed by their state and local government with the purpose of preparing the youth to manage adult responsibilities.<sup>9</sup>

The Chafee Program specifically requires that states use the federal funds to create programs that identify children who are likely to remain in foster care until the age of 18, then aid in their transition to self-sufficiency until they are 21 or age out of foster care.<sup>10</sup> As contemplated by the FCIA, self-sufficiency includes targeted competencies in the areas of personal finance, education, preventive health activities, and personal and emotional support.<sup>11</sup>

### LIFE SKILLS: GEORGIA LAW & DFCS POLICY

**Georgia Independent Living Program (ILP):** Georgia's ILP advances the broad goals of the Chafee Program through the provision of services and supports to eligible youth ages 14 and older like tutoring, college tours and college prep workshops, life coaches, postsecondary assistance, personal finance courses, career coaching, relationship management information, household management information, and courses on handling legal matters.<sup>12</sup> The program also provides resources for young adults who have left foster care. This includes rental assistance, life coaching, short-term counseling, and support group services.<sup>13</sup>

**Individual Development Account (IDA):** Georgia DFCS created the IDA savings account program to help eligible youth age 16-21 (in or out of foster care, but enrolled in the Georgia ILP) accumulate assets and learn about necessities for independent living.<sup>14</sup> Having an IDA allows youth to open a savings account that can be used to make "qualified asset purchases" for which DFCS will match up to \$1,000, based on available funding.<sup>15</sup> Qualified purchases include purchasing, insuring, or repairing a vehicle; investments; housing; credit building; educational expenses, health and dental care; and similar acquisitions or transactions related to the overall purpose of the Chafee Program.<sup>16</sup>

**Driver Education, Licensure, and State Identification:** When desired by a youth 15-17 or young adult participating in the EYSS program, a plan for driver's education must be included in the written Transitional Living Plan.<sup>17</sup> All sign-up requirements for driver's education (i.e., consent to participate in the program, car insurance, and required state ID) must be completed or ensured by the responsible case manager.<sup>18</sup>

**Casey Life Skills Assessment (CLSA):** CLSA was developed by Casey Family Programs as a method for assessing the readiness and skill level of young adults to live alone.<sup>19</sup> DFCS requires case managers to administer the initial CLSA within 15 days of a child in care turning age 14 or entering care if the child is between 14 and 17 years old.<sup>20</sup> Those results are required to be included in the written Transitional Living Plan within 30 days of the youth entering care.<sup>21</sup> The case manager must re-administer the CLSA within 60 days of the youth reaching age 15 and another at age 17, and incorporate the results into an updated Transitional Living Plan.<sup>22</sup>

## EDUCATION

Through the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendments, the FCIA was amended to provide additional money to states to support the education and training of youth who age out of foster care.<sup>23</sup> Specifically, states can use ETV funding to offset the cost of postsecondary education up to \$5,000 per year or the cost of attendance as defined by the Higher Education Act, whichever is less.<sup>24</sup>

### EDUCATION: GEORGIA LAW & DFCS POLICY

**Education & Training Vouchers:** Through a contract with DFCS, ETV funds are administered by the J.W. Fanning Institute for Leadership Development housed at the University of Georgia. Up to \$5,000 per year is available for eligible students, age 18-25, for any post-secondary education and/or training related financial needs remaining after all other sources of financial aid are applied.<sup>25</sup> Students must attend an accredited post-secondary educational institution, and eligibility is capped at five years.<sup>26</sup> Services that can be funded include room and board, standardized testing, stipends for hygiene and personal maintenance, and more.<sup>27</sup> Students in the ETV program are also eligible to receive a monthly Chafee stipend of either \$200 (when living on campus or in a DFCS paid placement) or \$400 (when living off campus in a non-paid placement) per month.<sup>28</sup>

**Post-Secondary Tuition Waivers:** For students in foster care, participating in an ILP, or placed for adoption by DFCS after turning 14, Georgia waives tuition and fees associated with earning a high school equivalency diploma or attending a public, post-secondary institution within the Technical College System of Georgia.<sup>29</sup> The Georgia legislature also has codified its recommendation that the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia adopt a similar tuition waiver program for students in foster care who attend a public college or university within the University System of Georgia.<sup>30</sup>



**Transition Planning:** Independent Living Specialists are required to ensure that all written Transitional Living Plans for the youth they serve specifically address their education goals after turning 18.<sup>31</sup> Although Georgia law does not specifically direct the content of transition plans, DFCS is required to include in the case plan of every youth in foster care age 14 and older, a written description of the services and programs that will support transition to independent living.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, for youth in foster care nearing their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, DFCS must provide assistance to develop a personalized transition plan that addresses education, among other life domains. The transition plan must be completed in the 90 days prior to the youth's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.<sup>33</sup>

## HEALTH CARE

The FCIA permits states to take advantage of the Medicaid option to extend health care coverage under Chafee Medicaid to youth formerly in foster care until their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday subject to caps on assets, resources, and income.<sup>34</sup> Beyond standard benefits, Chafee Medicaid provides states with flexible funding to promote “preventive health activities,” like smoking avoidance, nutritional education, and pregnancy prevention.<sup>35</sup> These benefits are available to all youth currently in foster care and to those who were in care on their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday even if they did not remain in foster care beyond the age of 18.<sup>36</sup>

### HEALTH CARE: GEORGIA LAW & DFCS POLICY

Medicaid coverage for children and youth in Georgia's foster care system is administered through a managed care program, Georgia Families 360°, which is designed to provide coordinated care to meet their physical, dental, and behavioral health needs. Each child and youth in foster care should have a medical and dental home, access to preventive care screenings, and timely assessments. Presently, the statewide Medicaid Care Management Organization (CMO) contract is held by Amerigroup Georgia.<sup>37</sup>

**John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program Medicaid Coverage:** Medicaid eligibility can be extended until age 21 for youth who opted out of foster care at age 18 unless or until the youth dies, moves out of state, requests closure of their Medicaid case, is incarcerated, or fails to cooperate with their eligibility redetermination or case review.<sup>38</sup> Chafee Medicaid eligibility can also terminate when DFCS determines another Medicaid program would be more beneficial.<sup>39</sup>

**Child Welfare Foster Care (CWFC) Medicaid:** CWCF provides health coverage to transition age youth ages 18-21 who are receiving EYSS or participating in ILP after opting out of foster care.<sup>40</sup> To be eligible, a youth must meet citizenship and age requirements.<sup>41</sup>

**Emergency Medical Financial Assistance:** Transition age youth may apply for time-limited funding to be used to cover certain medical expenses, including prescriptions; medical, dental, or vision exams; and medical, dental, or vision procedures.<sup>42</sup>

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## CASE PLANNING: GEORGIA LAW & DFCS POLICY

The delivery of services for transition age youth is guided by intentional and comprehensive case planning, as is required for all children in foster care.<sup>43</sup> As directed by state law, case plans must include: (1) information about the youth's exit from care such as what age the youth will exit, whether the youth will participate in any extended foster care services, and the youth's living arrangements upon exiting care and (2) determination of the youth's program and service needs including assessments and the rationale used to make these determinations and intended outcomes of these supports. Case plans are to be developed in collaboration with the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) and the parent, guardian, or legal custodian of the youth in care.<sup>44</sup>

For youth ages 14 and older in foster care, DFCS must submit to the court a permanency plan that describes the programs and services that will be provided to assist the youth in preparing to transition from foster care to independent living. The plan must specify the rationale for selection of each program and service, the intended outcome, and the time frame for service delivery.<sup>45</sup> This transition plan should be incorporated into the child's case plan.<sup>46</sup> The plan must also include a document describing certain rights including with respect to education, health, visitation, and court participation.<sup>47</sup> Specific rights including the right to be provided with a consumer report and the right to stay safe and avoid exploitation are also enumerated in state law.<sup>48</sup>

To facilitate the transition process, DFCS is directed to work with the youth in the 90 days before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday to develop an individualized transition plan that includes options regarding "[H]ousing, health insurance, education, local opportunities for mentors and continuing support services, and workforce supports and employment services."<sup>49</sup>

## FOSTERING CONNECTIONS TO SUCCESS AND INCREASING ADOPTIONS ACT OF 2008 (FCSIAA)

### GENERAL POLICY

The policies and funding accompanying the enactment of the FCIA were not effective at reducing the number of young adults aging out of foster care, and concerns about the capacity of child welfare systems to support the adult success of transition age youth persisted.<sup>50</sup>

Interests specifically related to well-being outcomes for children and youth in and exiting foster care compelled Congress to pass the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (FCSIAA).<sup>51</sup> The FCSIAA amends Title IV-B and Title IV-E of the Social Security Act to provide financial incentives to states to, among other things, extend foster care to age 21, support relative placement and permanency with relatives by requiring diligent searches and subsidizing kinship guardianship, and improve educational stability and healthcare oversight. Specific to transition age youth, the FCSIAA focuses on improving outcomes for youth in care or soon to leave care by promoting:

- Extended federal support for youth in care beyond 18-years-old;
- The use of transition plans for youth aging out of care;
- Educational stability and planning for youth and young adults in care;
- Coordinated health planning for youth and young adults in care.<sup>52</sup>

These and other areas of life domains must be addressed in a personalized transition plan co-developed by the caseworker, the youth, and other representatives of the child, including those chosen by the youth.<sup>53</sup>

### LIFE SKILLS

States are permitted to claim federal funds to provide extended independent living services or programming to young adults until the age of 21.<sup>54</sup>

### LIFE SKILLS: GEORGIA LAW & DFCS POLICY

**Georgia Extended Youth Services (EYSS):** Extended care youth services (or extended foster care) are provided to young adults through Georgia's Extended Youth Support Services (EYSS), based on a voluntary placement agreement entered into between DFCS and an eligible young adult.<sup>55</sup> To be eligible, the young adult must be age 18-21, a citizen or permanent legal resident of the United States, and a legal resident of Georgia.<sup>56</sup> The young adult must also be employed

for 80 hours per month and concurrently enrolled and completing a secondary education or equivalent program or participating in a job-readiness program. Alternatively, the young adult may be employed for at least 120 hours per month or be incapable of participating in education or employment activities due to a medical condition.<sup>57</sup>

Young adults who consent to participating in EYSS may remain eligible to receive ILP services and may remain in their foster care placement.<sup>58</sup> Prior to the age of 21, young adults have a six-month “reconsideration period” after exiting foster care to elect to participate in the EYSS program.<sup>59</sup> To effectuate the services, a transition plan must be created in collaboration between a case manager, the young adult, and any representatives of the young adult.<sup>60</sup> This plan must be completed within 30 days of the young adult agreeing to the placement.<sup>61</sup> Every 12 months, the young adult’s DFCS case manager must reevaluate eligibility.<sup>62</sup> The young adult is also able to end the agreement at any time.<sup>63</sup>

## EDUCATION

In its provisions addressing education outcomes, the FCSIAA requires state child welfare agencies to develop plans for ensuring the educational stability of children in foster care, including assuring:

- That placements take into account the appropriateness and proximity of the current school;
- That the school system and child welfare system work together to ensure a child remains in the school in which they are enrolled at the time of placement unless not in their best interests; and
- Immediate and appropriate enrollment if a child must change schools.<sup>64</sup>

The duty to coordinate with local educational agencies to achieve educational stability for foster youth is placed on child welfare agencies.

The FCSIAA also amended FCIA to extend ETVs to youth and young adults who exited foster care at 16 through kinship guardianship.<sup>65</sup>

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## EDUCATION: GEORGIA LAW & DFCS POLICY

**Case Planning:** DFCS is required to ensure that a youth’s case plan conforms to the educational stability requirements established in the FCSIAA by requiring that the case plan include an assurance that the placement takes into account the appropriateness of the youth’s current educational setting and proximity to school, an assurance that DFCS has coordinated with the

local school system to ensure the child remains in their home school; and an assurance that DFCS and the local school system have cooperated to ensure the immediate and appropriate enrollment of the youth in a new school if remaining in the home school is not in the youth's best interests.<sup>66</sup>

**Educational Stability:** DFCS policy expounds upon the federal and state statutory requirements.<sup>67</sup> Regarding older youth, DFCS policy directs that:

- (1) All children in foster care between the ages of five and eighteen be enrolled in school (which exceeds the compulsory education age of sixteen as established by Georgia law generally);
- (2) At the K-12 level, a school be given written notice when a child enters or re-enters DFCS care or changes placements;
- (3) Children in foster care receive educational support appropriate to their ability and needs. DFCS is charged to work directly with local educational agencies to ensure that children with special needs are provided with appropriate educational services and resources;
- (4) Every child in foster care receives individualized educational support through the assignment of a case manager who is charged with monitoring their child's educational progress and providing necessary support for them to be successful in school. These case managers are expected to collaborate with education support monitors to identify and address any issues that could derail their child's educational setting;
- (5) A youth who wishes to earn a GED (as opposed to a high school diploma) be referred to the Educational Programming, Assessment and Consultation (EPAC) unit to determine the appropriate program;
- (6) Upon aging out of foster care, former foster youth are to be provided their education records at no cost.

**Trauma Assessments:** Georgia law requires that every school that receives state funds "immediately and deliberately assess whether exposure to trauma has had or is likely to have an adverse impact on the foster care student's educational performance, including both academics and classroom behavior."<sup>68</sup> This assessment is completed by school personnel when the student in foster care enrolls in the school and is used to determine the student's eligibility for special education and related services. Furthermore, the Georgia Department of Education is required to "provide guidance to local school systems regarding trauma, the impacts of

trauma on students, including, but not limited to, foster care students, and procedures for the immediate and deliberate assessment of newly enrolled foster care students.”<sup>69</sup>

## CASE PLANNING: GEORGIA LAW & DFCS POLICY

**Transition Plan:** By law, DFCS must provide youth who are preparing to leave care with “assistance and support in developing a transition plan that is personalized at the direction of the child.” The plan should be prepared 90 days before the youth turns eighteen or plans to exit foster care and must include specific options on education and opportunities for mentors and continuing support services among other available supports.<sup>70</sup> The court is authorized to adopt or reject a transition plan submitted by the agency and must determine whether the plan supports a finding that DFCS has made reasonable efforts to facilitate a youth’s transition to independent living or another planned permanent living arrangement.<sup>71</sup>

Within 90 days from the conclusion or termination of EYSS services for young adults ages 18-21, DFCS must co-develop a *final* transition plan with the youth and their representatives. The transition plan must be personalized at the direction of the youth and address health care directives, including a durable power of attorney, health care proxy, or other similar document and specific options on housing, health insurance, education, local mentoring and support services, and workforce and employment supports.<sup>72</sup>

DFCS policy instructs that a Written Transitional Living Plan (WTLP) should be developed or updated with participation by the youth and their support system within 30 calendar days of:

- A youth 14 years of age or older entering foster care;
- A youth in foster care reaching 14 years of age;
- A youth reaching 18 years of age and receiving Extended Youth Support Services (EYSS);
- A youth’s participating in EYSS after exiting custody at 18 years of age or older;
- Identifying additional needs for a youth with an existing WTLP, including those identified upon completion of the Casey Life Skills Assessment (CLSA);
- New outcomes and tasks being ordered by the court; or
- The WTLP outcomes being achieved.<sup>73</sup>

Agency policy also imposes a general requirement to update the WTLP a minimum of every six months and directs that the WTLP be submitted to the court with the initial 30-day case plan (incorporated into the case plan for youth 14 years of age and older) and at each case review and permanency plan hearing thereafter.<sup>74</sup>

# CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES IMPROVEMENT AND INNOVATION ACT

## GENERAL POLICY

Among the provisions of the Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act most relevant to transition age youth, the act requires states to develop protocols for the appropriate use and monitoring of psychotropic medications and to adopt measures to minimize the risk of credit fraud for older youth in foster care.<sup>75</sup>

## LIFE SKILLS: GEORGIA LAW & DFCS POLICY

**Credit Reports:** DFCS is responsible for ensuring that each youth in foster care age 14 and older receives a free copy of their credit report annually until such time as they turn 18 together with help in understanding and fixing any credit inaccuracies. DFCS must also ensure that youth ages 14 and older participate in annual credit education to assist them in understanding consumer credit, properly interpreting credit reports, and obtaining credit reports independently.<sup>76</sup>

## HEALTH CARE: GEORGIA LAW & DFCS POLICY

**Psychotropic Medications:** DFCS policy outlines a host of requirements related to the provision and coordination of behavioral health care services to children in foster care whose assessments have identified a need for treatment. Additional levels of authorization and monitoring tasks are prescribed in circumstances in which psychotropic medications are being administered.<sup>77</sup>

Several provisions of the Georgia Juvenile Code require attention to a youth's health as a matter of case planning and services, but none specifically address the administration or oversight of psychotropic medications.

# PREVENTING SEX TRAFFICKING AND STRENGTHENING FAMILIES ACT

## GENERAL POLICY

Specific to transition age youth, the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act codifies “normalcy” in foster care through adoption of the “reasonable and prudent parent” standard in foster parent training and foster care placement standards.<sup>78</sup> The act further authorizes Chafee Program funds to support age or developmentally - appropriate activities for youth who are likely to age-out of foster care.<sup>79</sup> “Age or developmentally-appropriate” is separately defined to describe activities generally accepted as suitable based on the child’s chronological age, level of maturity, or cognitive, emotional, physical, and behavioral capacities.<sup>80</sup> The court must inquire about and document at the permanency hearing and the six-month periodic review how the foster family institutes the “reasonable and prudent parenting standard” and whether the child has opportunities to engage in “age or developmentally-appropriate activities.”<sup>81</sup>

This federal law also addresses the needs and experiences of older youth in foster care by:

- Eliminating “another planned permanent living arrangement (APPLA)” as an available permanency goal for children under the age of 16 and requiring more extensive documentation and inquiry about the continued appropriateness of APPLA as a goal for any child or youth;
- Requiring more meaningful, youth-centered transition plans for youth fourteen and older that address the child’s rights, are developed in consultation with the child, and describe services to help the youth transition to adulthood;
- Requiring the agency to provide youth who are transitioning from care with official identity documents, health insurance information and medical records, and a driver’s license or state identification card; and
- Requiring state reporting on youth in foster care who are pregnant or parenting and who are placed in non-foster home settings.<sup>82</sup>

## LIFE SKILLS: GEORGIA LAW & DFCS POLICY

**Identity Documents and Personal Information:** Georgia law imposes a mandate on DFCS to provide each youth who is aging out of foster at age 18, who has been in foster care for more than six months, with an official or certified copy of their birth certificate, a social security card,



health insurance information, a copy of their medical records, a driver's license or identification card, and "any official documentation necessary to prove that the child was previously in foster care."<sup>83</sup>

DFCS policy sets the expectation that youth in foster care will be supported in obtaining a driver's license and "ID when identification is required to support other transition activity (e.g. employment)" as provided for in the youth's WTLP.<sup>84</sup> By the time a youth ages out of foster care, they should have a driver's license or identification card.<sup>85</sup>

**Normalcy in Foster Care:** Georgia law requires that, at the time of placement, DFCS provide caregivers with a description of the reasonable and prudent parenting standard.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, DFCS must document to the satisfaction of the court that it is taking steps to ensure family foster homes or group homes are following the reasonable and prudent parenting standard and have "regular, ongoing opportunities to engage in age or developmentally appropriate activities."<sup>87</sup> The "reasonable and prudent parenting" standard is defined to mean:

the standard characterized by careful and sensible parental decisions that maintain the health, safety, and best interests of a child while at the same time encouraging the emotional and developmental growth of the child, that a caregiver shall use when determining whether to allow a child in foster care under the responsibility of the department to participate in extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, and social activities.<sup>88</sup>

Relatedly, the phrase "age or developmentally appropriate" is defined as

activities or items that are generally accepted as suitable for children of the same chronological age or level of maturity or that are determined to be developmentally-appropriate for a child, based on the development of cognitive, emotional, physical, and behavioral capacities that are typical for an age or age group.<sup>89</sup>

The specific agency supports for caregivers exercising reasonable and prudent parenting are outlined in DFCS policy, which is consistent with the requirements set out in federal and state law.<sup>90</sup>

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## CASE PLANNING: GEORGIA LAW & DFCS POLICY

**Trauma Informed Services:** DFCS policy requires that any child suspected of being a victim of sexual exploitation or trafficking be referred to an available victim assistance organization which provides comprehensive trauma-informed services designed to alleviate the adverse effects of trafficking victimization and to aid in the child's healing, including, but not limited to,

assistance with case management, placement, access to educational and legal services, and mental health services.<sup>91</sup>

**Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement:** When the plan for a youth is another planned permanent living arrangement, the juvenile court must make findings as to “[W]hether DFCS has documented intensive, ongoing, and, as of the date of the hearing, unsuccessful efforts” to reunify the child or to place the child with a relative, guardian, or adoptive parent.<sup>92</sup> The inquiry includes efforts to use search to return the child to the home or to secure a placement for the child with a fit and willing relative, a legal guardian, or an adoptive parent, including through efforts that use technology tools and social media to find biological family members.<sup>93</sup>

**Transition Plan:** DFCS case managers are required to provide youth who are preparing to leave care with “assistance and support in developing a transition plan that is personalized at the direction of the child.” The plan should be prepared 90 days before the youth turns eighteen or plans to exit foster care. The plan should include specific options on education and opportunities for mentors and continuing support services among other available supports.<sup>94</sup>

For young adults ages 18-21 who are receiving extended care youth services, DFCS must co-develop a personalized transition plan with the youth and their representatives. A transition plan should address health care directives, including a durable power of attorney, health care proxy, or other similar document and specific options on housing, health insurance, education, local mentoring and support services, and workforce and employment supports.<sup>95</sup>

## FAMILY FIRST PREVENTION SERVICES ACT (FFPSA)

### GENERAL POLICY

The overall purpose of the FFPSA is to reduce unnecessary family separation and placement of children and youth in foster care by addressing specific adverse conditions within the family (mental health, substance use, parenting) through evidence-based prevention services.<sup>96</sup> For children and youth who enter foster care, the FFPSA emphasizes family-based placements. For transition age youth, the opportunity of the FFPSA is expanded access to trauma-informed, evidence-based services and programs to help stabilize the family and prevent the disruption and trauma of removal. “Candidates for foster care” – that is, those who are deemed by the state to be at imminent risk of entering foster care but for the provision of evidence-based treatment interventions to address mental health, substance use and abuse treatment, and parenting competencies – expectant and parenting youth in foster care, and parents and kin

caregivers of these youth are the intended beneficiaries of this new funding stream and its accompanying policies so long as eligibility and the specific services and programs are documented in an individual child's prevention plan.<sup>97</sup>

The FFPSA also refines the existing placement continuum to reinforce the value of family-based foster care by restricting funding for basic group home placement. Specialized placements including supervised independent living settings for youth age 18 and older; settings specializing in prenatal, postpartum, or parenting supports; residential settings for youth who are victims of or at risk of sex trafficking; and high-acuity residential treatment settings (referred to as "qualified residential treatment programs" in the federal law) are the only exceptions to the newly-imposed limitations on access to federal funds for non-family-based placements.<sup>98</sup>

Finally, among other changes to existing law, the FFPSA imposes or revises mandates related to case management practices for transition age youth. Specifically, the act:

- Requires that the state child welfare agency provide youth transitioning from care "any official documentation necessary to prove that the child was previously in foster care";
- Permits states to provide the Chafee program to young adults up to age twenty-three if the state extended foster care to age twenty-one or provides comparable services to young adults of that age; and
- Requires states to address the relationship between inappropriate (non-foster family home) placements and inappropriate mental health diagnoses in their Health Care Oversight and Coordination plan.<sup>99</sup>

## LIFE SKILLS

FFPSA expands the foundation of programming established by the Chafee Program in the area of life skills through provisions that allow states that have already elected to extend foster care services to former foster youth (i.e., those who have aged out of foster care) to the age of 21 to extend support longer to youth up to age 23.<sup>100</sup>

### LIFE SKILLS: GEORGIA LAW & DFCS POLICY

Georgia has not elected to extend ILP services beyond age 21.<sup>101</sup> Accordingly, the state has not elected to extend foster care through expansion of the Extended Youth Support Services program to young adults up to the age of 26 as permitted by federal law.

## EDUCATION

The FFPSA extends the age criteria for eligibility to receive ETVs to 26 years old and limits use to five years total.<sup>102</sup>

### EDUCATION: GEORGIA LAW & DFCS POLICY

Georgia extends ETV eligibility to age 25.<sup>103</sup>

## EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT OF 2015 (ESSA)

### GENERAL POLICY

ESSA was aimed at reforming the unworkable requirements set by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 and more comprehensively preparing students for success in college and beyond.<sup>104</sup>

ESSA was a further attempt to act on knowledge about how foster and former foster youth experience life in and out of care, and specifically, about experiences of educational instability while in foster care. ESSA contains provisions specifically targeting youth in foster care which round out the educational stability mandates of the FCSIAA, largely by requiring state and local educational agencies to collaborate in ways that mirror the obligations imposed by FCSIAA on state child welfare agencies.<sup>105</sup> ESSA focuses more on setting foster youth up for success than on providing them with resources after they exit the K-12 school system.

## EDUCATION

ESSA includes several educational stability provisions, but those that are most targeted toward minimizing educational disruption for older youth in care address school of origin and transportation. ESSA's provisions, descriptively, mirror the requirements imposed by the FCSIAA to impose a reciprocal duty on the school system to ensure educational continuity and school stability for children and youth in foster care.

**School of Origin:** A youth in foster care must enroll or remain in their school of origin unless it is determined by the state education agency that it is not in the youth's best interest to remain at the school. When a school change is necessary, the youth must be enrolled immediately in an appropriate school, and school records must be transferred.<sup>106</sup>

**Transportation:** Local schools must collaborate with child welfare agencies to create clear procedures for how transportation will be provided and funded for youth in foster care to attend their schools of origin for the entirety of their time in care.<sup>107</sup>

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## EDUCATION: GEORGIA LAW & DFCS POLICY

**Educational Needs:** DFCS policy sets forth ESSA compliant policies, focusing on the responsibilities and obligations of the child welfare agency to collaborate with state and local education agencies.<sup>108</sup>

As required by the FCSIAA, DFCS must include in its case plan an assurance that the placement takes into account the appropriateness of the youth's current educational setting and proximity to school, an assurance that DFCS has coordinated with the local school system to ensure the child remains in their home school; and an assurance that DFCS and the local school system have cooperated to ensure the immediate and appropriate enrollment of the youth in a new school if remaining in the home school is not in the youth's best interests.<sup>109</sup>

## AFFORDABLE CARE ACT OF 2010 (ACA)

### GENERAL POLICY

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) was enacted in 2010 and implemented fully in 2014 to address these challenges of lack of health care access and insurance coverage in the general public.<sup>110</sup> It specifically targets transition age youth and former foster youth by bypassing the Chafee Option (Medicaid extension to 21 for former foster youth) and establishing categorical eligibility for former foster youth until the age of 26 years old.<sup>111</sup>

### HEALTH CARE

The ACA requires all states to extend Medicaid coverage to age 26 for all youth who were in foster care on their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

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## HEALTH CARE: GEORGIA LAW & DFCS POLICY

**Former Foster Care Medicaid:** Georgia offers this Medicaid extension in compliance with the ACA, honoring coverage for youth who age out of foster care through the end of the month that they turn 26 years old.<sup>112</sup> Eligibility for youth/young adults does not depend on their income or a pre-existing condition.<sup>113</sup>

## FAMILY UNIFICATION PROGRAM (FUP) AND FOSTER YOUTH TO INDEPENDENCE PROGRAM (FYI)

### GENERAL POLICY

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) offers Housing Choice Vouchers (HCVs) targeted at providing housing security to former foster youth and young adults through the Federal Unification Program and the Foster Youth to Independence Initiative.<sup>114</sup> HCVs are administered by state public housing agencies, which administer the vouchers under contracts with HUD.<sup>115</sup>

### HOUSING

**Family Unification Program (FUP):** Administered by HUD, the FUP provides federally-funded housing vouchers to public housing authorities who partner with public child welfare agencies. The child welfare agency is responsible for referring families and youth to the housing authority for assistance.<sup>116</sup> FUP provides unlimited public housing rental assistance in the form of Housing Choice Vouchers (HCVs) to families for whom the lack of adequate housing is a primary factor in removal or barrier to reunification and, for a maximum of 36 months, to eligible youth age 18-24 who are leaving foster care within 90 days or who have already left foster care.<sup>117</sup> In addition to rental assistance, the program is required to provide eligible youth recipients with supportive services to teach them skills including money management, job prep, education assistance, and nutrition through the child welfare agency, for 18 months.<sup>118</sup>

**Foster Youth to Independence Initiative (FYI):** The FYI program also makes housing vouchers available to public housing authorities in partnership with public child welfare agencies.<sup>119</sup> FYI is different from FUP in that the FYI vouchers can be used only by youth who have left or are currently transitioning out of care.<sup>120</sup> FYI also requires child welfare agencies to provide up to 36 months of supportive services.<sup>121</sup>

In 2020, the Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Amendments permitted up to 24-month assistance extensions for FYI and FUP recipients.<sup>122</sup> Extensions apply if: (1) the youth participates in a Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program implemented by the housing authority; (2) the youth was engaged in education, job development, or employment for at least nine of the latest 12 months before the extension and could not enroll in an FSS program; or (3) the youth falls out of the prior categories but is (a) a parent or household member who cares for a child under six or an incapacitated person, (b) regularly in drug or alcohol treatment and a rehabilitation program, or (c) unable to meet other requirements because of a medical condition.<sup>123</sup>

## HOUSING: GEORGIA LAW & DFCS POLICY

Local Housing Authorities across the state open and close limited waitlists throughout the year, through which transition age youth can receive HCVs and participate in voluntary services offered by the Housing Authority and/or DFCS. For instance, the Atlanta Housing Authority provides FUP vouchers to youth 18-21 who left foster care at age 16 or older, and planned to administer 300 vouchers in Fiscal Year 2023.<sup>124</sup> Youth must participate in a lottery to obtain a voucher because federal funding limits how many individuals or families can be served.<sup>125</sup> The Atlanta Housing Authority also had access to FYI vouchers from 2017 to 2021, but never implemented the accompanying self-sufficiency program or released the vouchers because the agency did not receive referrals from DFCS for youth aging out of foster care.<sup>126</sup>

## YOUTH POLICY & ADVOCACY ASSESSMENT SURVEY

In furtherance of this report, the Barton Center collaborated with the Multi-Agency Alliance for Children and Georgia EmpowerMENT (MAAC/Georgia EmpowerMENT) to develop and disseminate a Youth Policy and Advocacy Assessment Survey to a group of thirty-eight transition age and former foster youth. The survey was created by the Barton Center with comment from Georgia EmpowerMENT youth advocates. Central to this project was Georgia EmpowerMENT youth leader, Leslie McClain, who spearheaded the survey efforts.<sup>127</sup> The general goal of the survey was to gauge the degree to which foster youth and young adults with foster care experience are aware of the federal and state policy commitments made to support transition age youth in Georgia. Respondents, representing foster youth from metro Atlanta and surrounding communities, as well as more rural areas of Georgia, were asked to share their familiarity with specific commitments Georgia has made by way of laws and policies intended to support both older youth in foster care and those aging out of the system. The survey and corresponding responses serve as a broad report that highlights a number of existing gaps between policy implementation and target recipients' understandings of the benefits the State has sought to provide.

### YOUTH SURVEY RESPONSE SUMMARY

Below are a selection of highlighted questions and responses from the Youth Policy and Advocacy Assessment Survey:

<b>Where did you live for most of your time in foster care?</b>  Metro Atlanta 23.7% Suburbs 28.9% Rural Georgia 44.7% Outside of Georgia 2.6%	<b>How aware are you of the Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood?</b>  Very aware 24.3% Somewhat aware 37.8% Not at all aware 37.8%
<b>Do you know that all foster youth ages 14-26 can participate in GA RYSE?</b>  Yes 63.2% No 13.2% I'm not aware of GA RYSE 23.7%	<b>Do you know that all foster youth ages 14-26 can participate in GA RYSE?</b>  Yes 63.2% No 13.2% I'm not aware of GA RYSE 23.7%
<b>Do you know that once foster youth turn 14, they are entitled to case plans that include documents about their rights, descriptions of programs and services</b>	<b>Do you know that DFCS offers credit report services to foster youth over 14-years-old that include a printed copy of their credit report yearly until 18, credit</b>



<p><b>available to help prepare for transitioning out of care, and a full transition plan made through coordination between the youth and their case manager?</b></p> <p>Yes 75% No 25%</p>	<p><b>reviews, credit education, and credit maintenance assistance?</b></p> <p>Yes 71.1% No 28.9%</p>
<p><b>Do you know that certain foster youth between 18 and 25-years-old participating in ILP can receive Education and Training Vouchers (ETV) to pay for costs at a college/university and/or training institutes?</b></p> <p>Yes 94.6% No 5.4%</p>	<p><b>Do you know that Georgia waives tuition and fees associated with earning a GED or attending a public college/university in the state for students in foster care, students in an ILP, or students adopted after 14-years old?</b></p> <p>Yes 77.8% No 22.2%</p>
<p><b>Do you know that foster youth who were in care on the 18th birthday can receive Chafee Medicaid until they are 21?</b></p> <p>Yes 68.4% No 31.6%</p>	<p><b>Do you know that foster youth over 14-years-old can apply for funding to cover certain medical services, including prescriptions; medical, dental, or vision exams; and similar procedures?</b></p> <p>Yes 67.6% No 32.4%</p>
<p><b>How aware are you of the Fostering Connections Act?</b></p> <p>Very aware 13.5% Somewhat aware 29.7% Not at all aware 56.8%</p>	<p><b>Do you know that young adults in foster care and enrolled in post-secondary education (including vocational training) can receive extended youth services (EYSS) between ages 18 and 21?</b></p> <p>Yes 55.3% No 44.7%</p>
<p><b>Do you know that enrollment in EYSS is voluntary and can be updated/renewed yearly?</b></p> <p>Yes 31.6% No 68.4%</p>	<p><b>Do you know that young adults in foster care can receive the same services they received under ILP without interruption when enrolled in EYSS?</b></p> <p>Yes 35.1% No 64.9%</p>
<p><b>Do you know that Georgia must ensure that foster youth experience educational stability through measures like keeping youth enrolled in school, providing youth with special educational needs with appropriate services and resources, and creating individualized educational support?</b></p> <p>Yes 63.9 % No 36.1%</p>	<p><b>Do you know that Georgia schools are required to conduct trauma assessments when a youth in foster care enrolls in school?</b></p> <p>Yes 45.9% No 54.1%</p>

<p><b>How aware are you of the Every Student Succeeds Act?</b></p> <p>Very aware 18.4%</p> <p>Somewhat aware 34.2%</p> <p>Not at all aware 47.4%</p>	<p><b>Do you know that foster youth are supposed to be kept at the school they were in before entering care unless its not in their best interest?</b></p> <p>Yes 50%</p> <p>No 50%</p>
<p><b>Do you know that local education agencies are supposed to ensure that foster youth get adequate transportation to and from school?</b></p> <p>Yes 47.4%</p> <p>No 52.6%</p>	<p><b>How aware are you of the Affordable Care Act?</b></p> <p>Very aware 32.4%</p> <p>Somewhat aware 37.8%</p> <p>Not at all aware 29.7%</p>
<p><b>Do you know that all young people in foster care at 18-years-old are eligible for Georgia’s Medicaid plan until the end of the month that they turn 26?</b></p> <p>Yes 70.3%</p> <p>No 29.7%</p>	<p><b>How aware are you of the Family Unification Program (FUP) or the Foster Youth to Independence Program (FYI)?</b></p> <p>Very aware 21.1%</p> <p>Somewhat aware 42.1%</p> <p>Not at all aware 36.8%</p>
<p><b>Do you know that Housing Authorities across Georgia offer housing vouchers and services to older foster youth?</b></p> <p>Yes 45.9%</p> <p>No 54.1%</p>	
<p><b>Based on your experiences in foster care, what improvements or changes do you think are needed to better support older foster youth and former foster youth who are young adults?</b></p> <p>“Empathetic guidance and care”</p> <p>“Everything. I should have stayed where I was.”</p> <p>“Better surveillance”</p> <p>“I think have access to a website that has a good format and contacts to reach out to would be helpful.”</p> <p>“I think y’all need to let kids know more about this because I’m 19 and didn’t know what all of these were.”</p> <p>“I would say that more case managers [need to] express the urgency of following with the programs.”</p> <p>“I feel that some case managers can be corrupt in DFCS.”</p> <p>“Older and former foster youth need to be able to get the resources and supplies they need to live normal lives.”</p> <p>“Providing this information would be very helpful. Case managers/lawyers need to be well aware of these opportunities as well so that they may suggest them to their youth.”</p> <p>“Parenting and healthy relationships for young people exiting care. Better life skills workshops. Cooking ILP classes. Obtaining a driver’s license and basic real life budgeting outlines.”</p> <p>“After doing this survey I think that case workers should inform and ensure that all youth and young adults in care receive all that is offered. As someone who has spent their whole life in care and just know becoming aware of all the benefits I am quite upset.”</p> <p>“The system should do better background checks with the foster parents because it sad to say that some of the parents that I have been with in the past were only in it for the money.”</p>	

"I think that there needs to be a way to monitor the information that is or is not being provided by the state towards individuals in care. Government officials should also be more up to date on the knowledge and information for the opportunities and services offered to former and current youth in care."

Reviewing the responses gathered, the Youth Policy Advocacy and Assessment Survey demonstrates that while participants generally are aware of the policies and programs designed to serve transition age youth in Georgia, a significant disconnect exists between policy intent, youth familiarity with available programs, and the experience of older youth in the Georgia foster care system. Alarming, the survey reveals that on average, anywhere from 30% to 50% of respondents are *unaware* of certain benefits presently available to them, despite belonging to the precise class of present and former foster youth to which these policies are targeted.

## YOUTH FOCUS GROUPS

Following dissemination of the Policy and Advocacy Assessment Survey, the Barton Center along with MAAC/Georgia Empowerment, organized two youth focus groups designed to 1) build on the knowledge gained from the survey and 2) further illuminate questions of policy intent versus impacted youth experience in Georgia. The focus groups were facilitated by Kyra Stoute, a youth advocate, and Sarah Bess Hudson, Lead Facilitator with Georgia EmpowerMENT, and focused on a set of ten thoughtful questions Stoute drafted to elicit insights from foster youth regarding their perspectives on specific transition age youth policies.

Five youth participated in Focus Group #1, and six participated in Focus Group #2. Participating youth ranged in age from 14 to 18 years old and all were presently placed in a congregate care setting. Their responses, characterized by passion and high engagement, reveal a notable and profound awareness. While not deeply versed in specific policies, participating youth responses demonstrate a keen understanding of the significant role family, community, education, mental health, lifestyle, and employment play in supporting positive outcomes for transition age youth.

Included below is a summary of the ten questions, and a combined review of the focus group responses and recommendations. This summary serves as a poignant exploration of the experiences and aspirations of young people in foster care, highlighting not just the existing gaps in policy and experience but also the profound impact of healing and empowerment in their journey.

## YOUTH FOCUS GROUPS RESPONSE SUMMARY

Focus Group #1 and Focus Group #2 considered the same ten questions, which were used to guide the ensuing conversation:

- 1) What policies do you know about that help young people like you as they move from foster care to being adults?
- 2) How easy or hard is it for you to get the support and help that the policies talk about? Use a scale from 1 to 10, where 9-10 means it's really easy, and 1 means it's really hard.
- 3) If you could be the one making the policies, what policies would you make right now to help people like you who are in or have been in foster care?
- 4) How would you want to be part of deciding on the policies that help young people in foster care and those moving out of foster care?
- 5) How much do you know about the policies that are there to help young people in foster care, like you?
- 6) Which policies do you think help you the most, and why do you think so?
- 7) Which policies do you think don't help you much, and why do you feel that way?
- 8) How do you think the policies we have right now affect your health, how you feel in your mind, your education, and finding a job? Can you think of other ways the policies affect you too?
- 9) How can we make sure that the people who make the policies know what you've been through and what you want for your future?
- 10) What's the best way to tell young people in care about the policies that affect them?

Generally speaking, the participants' responses evidence a broad, albeit only superficial familiarity with existing policies for older and transition age foster youth in Georgia. While participating youth demonstrate some understanding of the resources available to them, their responses reveal that they frequently have trouble accessing those resources and possess little understanding of the different categories of services and resources that are available under specific programs. This general lack of familiarity with specific policies among participating youth challenged their ability to respond to some of the questions presented. Most notably, youth were not able to adequately answer questions that encouraged them to consider current policies and identify those that are more, or less helpful, and those that asked youth to consider the impact of specific policies on physical health, mental health, education, and job

opportunities. Nevertheless, there remains much to be learned from the responses collected, particularly as it relates to participants' recommendations for further policy development.

As to participant familiarity with existing policies aimed to help young people as they move through foster care, combining responses from Focus Group #1 & #2 and rounding to the nearest percent, participant familiarity with specific policies and programs can be quantified at the following rates:

<b>Extended Foster Care (EYSS):</b> 73% of participants are aware of EYSS	<b>Independent Living Program (ILP):</b> 91% of participants are aware of ILP
<b>Permanency Roundtables:</b> 27% of participants are aware of permanency roundtables	<b>Georgia Youth Opportunities Initiatives:</b> 9% of participants are aware of GYO initiatives
<b>Georgia Adoption Reunion Registry:</b> 64% of participants are aware of the registry	<b>Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children:</b> 0% of participants are aware of ICPC
<b>GA Youth Empowerment Success Services (YESS):</b> 18% of participants are aware of YESS	<b>Child Welfare Reform Council:</b> 27% of participants are aware of the reform council
<b>Relative Caregiver Program:</b> 27% of participants are aware of the program	

When participants were asked to use a scale from 1 to 10 to indicate how easy or hard it is to get the support and help these policies provide, where 9-10 means it's "really easy," and 1 means it's "really hard," there was considerable variation in responses:

<b>2 participants responded "1"</b>
<b>3 participants responded "3"</b>
<b>1 participant responded "6"</b>
<b>2 participants responded "7"</b>
<b>2 participants responded "8"</b>
<b>1 participant responded "9"</b>

To understand this variation, it is helpful to consider the additional observations participating youth made in response to these first two questions. With reference to the comments included in response to questions 1 and 2, participant observations suggest that 1) access to supports depends on the ability to self-advocate; 2) too few policies are known to youth, making accessing resources difficult; 3) the ability to access resources depends on length of time in care and adequacy and quality of case plans or transition plan; and 4) monthly or bi-monthly caseworker visits, limited caseworker availability, high caseworker turnover, and inconsistencies in caseworker commitment all contribute to experienced difficulties in accessing resources.

When asked how they would like to be a part of deciding policies that support young people in foster care and those moving out of foster care, participants provided the following suggestions:

- Peers and former foster youth who are “making it on their own” should be celebrated and featured in public speaking events, billboards, and district “parties” to celebrate their success.
- Youth should be included in polls, voting, surveys and there should be efforts to survey younger children.
- Youth should have their own website.
- Youth should have an opportunity to participate in child-appointed councils that meet regularly.
- Youth should have the opportunity to participate in a system of checks and balances for greater accountability.

When participants were asked how much they know about the policies designed to help young people in foster care, their responses tended to focus on recommendations for greater education and engagement, rather than present knowledge. To this end, participants made the following suggestions:

- There should be a policy book issued annually to all youth and the policies explained should address not just policies for youth existing care, but also those entering.
- There should be a comprehensive website and social media page for youth.
- There should be a requirement that foster youth are educated about policies and resources.

When asked which policies they felt helped them the most, participant responses again tended to focus on additional policy recommendations, rather than feelings toward current policy. The

resulting policy recommendations are incorporated in the sections below, but with respect to current policy, participants offered the following:

- The Extended Foster Care Program (EYSS) helps the most because you still receive your benefits.
- MACC organization and Independent Living Services are the most helpful.

With respect to the question of which policies participants find least helpful, participants appeared unable to offer a direct response due to their general unfamiliarity with the policies at issue and their limited understanding as to which services and resources are associated with which specific policies. Here again, much of the conversation focused on additional policy recommendations, which are incorporated below. At least one youth did respond that in their opinion, the least helpful policies are those that restrict youth from seeing family.

When asked how policy makers could be made aware of foster youth experiences and their desires for the future, participants provided a number of interesting recommendations, including:

- Creating campus councils that could come together for various events;
- Making sure that policy makers visited group homes and foster homes and spent time talking directly to the youth, much like nurses on rounds do;
- Providing opportunities for roundtable discussions with various foster youth

When participants were asked to consider which policies they would institute to help those in foster care, they provided a number of thoughtful recommendations. These recommendations are noteworthy, not only in that they evidence a keen understanding of factors known to support positive outcomes, but also in that several of these recommendations are already in effect, a fact which demonstrates both an ongoing lack of clarity about what is available, and a pervasive disconnect between policy and the practice that impacts youth experience.

Though unintentional in design, the policy recommendations put forth by the focus group participants can be organized broadly into the same familiar policy categories used to frame the summary of policies earlier in this report. Organizing the youth recommendations in this manner makes for an interesting comparison between the intended effects of existing policy, and the issues participating youth find most pressing.

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## YOUTH POLICY SUGGESTIONS FOR EDUCATION

- Participating youth highlighted a need for policies providing “barrier free” access to postsecondary opportunities.
- Participating youth believe there should be policies to create app-based curriculums and game-based platforms that would allow youth to learn about different policies and resources for youth in care.

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## YOUTH POLICY SUGGESTIONS FOR PERSONAL & EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

- Participating youth requested policies to increase therapy-focused care.
- Participating youth highlighted a need for policies establishing their right to their own possessions.
- Participating youth suggested policies to promote normal healthy relationships with friends and relatives, including allowing time with friends, siblings, and other family members and provisions for faster approval of visitation requests.
- Participating youth expressed a desire for policies that encourage open communication with family members, even where the permanency plan calls for adoption or non-reunification.
- Participating youth report a need for policies providing for greater engagement and more opportunities for bonding and relationship building.
- Participating youth desire policies that would ensure youth remain connected to their hometowns.
- Participating youth would like to see policies that provide youth with peer mentor training and a formalized system for peer mentors.
- Participating youth believe there should be better policies around room checks, which youth report are often triggering and mismanaged.
- Participating youth highlighted the need for policies to provide increased mental health training for foster placements.
- Participating youth suggested that policies be amended to allow more time for recreation, games, and access to parks and other off-campus facilities.



- Participating youth stated that there should be better policies to promote safety on campus and in placements.
- Participating youth want policy makers to consider the fact that sometimes, mixing different age groups doesn't work well due to different needs and maturity levels.
- Participating youth believe that "Prudent Parenting" should be more than a four-day course.

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## YOUTH POLICY SUGGESTIONS FOR CASE PLANING

- Participating youth repeatedly highlighted the need for policies to better enforce the timelines for required services.
- Participating youth highlighted a need for policies to provide foster youth with more information about perspective foster placements.
- Participating youth suggested policies that would require foster parents to visit youth in the group homes prior to placement or adoption so that there is more natural interaction with food, conversation, and activities.
- Participating youth feel there should be provisions to allow them greater exposure to the policies and laws governing their care.
- Participating youth desire greater opportunities for group learning on resources and policies that support youth in care.
- Participating youth desire policies that would ensure youth are included in the meetings that are held about them.
- Participating youth believe there should be policies that promote greater consistency in Behavior Aids.
- Participating youth believe they should have greater access to caseworkers and that caseworkers should be required to visit more frequently. Youth believe increased access here should include emergency lines and policies requiring that someone respond to phone calls.
- Participating youth feel caseworkers should have fewer cases.
- Participating youth believe there should be policies that require mandatory zoom check-ins with case managers and others.
- Participating youth would like to see policies allowing CASAs to function as secondary case workers.

- Participating youth desire policies that provide for better coordination between counties.
- Participating youth desire policies that prevent them from being “rushed” out of care.
- Participating youth believe there should be policies in place that focus specifically on foster homes and adoptive placements for older youth.
- Participating youth want to see policies for increased de-escalation training for group home staff.

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## YOUTH POLICY SUGGESTIONS FOR HEALTH CARE

- Participating youth stated there should be better policies around confidentiality.
- Participating youth want to see policies for increased access to mental health evaluations and services, particularly when youth first come into care.
- Participating youth believe there should be policies giving youth a greater say in the medications they are given.
- Participating youth believe there should be a greater emphasis on physical health and well-being, including better access to medical care both while in care, and upon exit.
- Participating youth believe there should be better options for healthcare so that youth aren’t forced to see providers they aren’t comfortable with just because they are on Medicaid.
- Participating youth desire better policies related to youth access to over-the-counter medications and acne/skin care products.
- Participating youth believe insurance policies should be updated such that approval does not take so long.
- Participating youth wish that policy makers would consider that stress impacts health, and health impacts stress.

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## YOUTH POLICY SUGGESTIONS FOR PERSONAL FINANCE

- Participating youth suggested policies that would help youth acquire their first vehicle.

- Participating youth highlighted the need for an increase in clothing allowances. Youth report that the present allowance does not take inflation into account and does not provide adequate funds for those that are parenting and caring for their own children while in care.
- Participating youth desire policies that would assist them in getting jobs while in care.

Again, in exploring the policy recommendations posited by participating foster youth, it is evident that they possess a keen understanding of the myriad of factors known to significantly impact youth outcomes. What they lack, however, is a thorough understanding of the laws and policies already in place that are intended to support older and transition age foster youth in Georgia. By their own accounts, this lack of understanding presents a barrier in respondents' ability to advocate for their own best interests, exercise agency and self-determination, and ensure they receive the full scope of services and resources available to them.

Based on the results of the survey and focus groups, it is evident that there is a need for a much greater coordinated effort to educate youth on existing policies and resources. Not only do foster youth possess a desire to better understand what is available, but as shown above, they have a number of constructive suggestions as to how meaningful gains might best be achieved.

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<sup>1</sup> Highlights from the NYTD Survey: Outcomes Reported by Young People at Ages 17, 19, and 21 (Cohort 2), NAT'L YOUTH IN TRANSITION DATABASE (2019), [https://acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/nytd\\_data\\_brief\\_7.pdf](https://acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/nytd_data_brief_7.pdf). Last accessed Oct. 23, 2023. See also Congressional Research Service, *Youth Transitioning from Foster Care: Background and Federal Programs*, May 29, 2019, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/RL34499.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> This brief adopts the definition of "transition age youth" used by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, which includes "young people between the ages of 14-26 who are in or transitioning out of the foster care system and into adulthood." See Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, *Challenge and Context: Providing Support, Stability, and Skills for Young People In and Aging Out of Foster Care*, [https://www.hiltonfoundation.org/programs/foster-youth#:~:text=For%20transition%20age%20youth%20\(TAY,this%20can%20be%20especially%20true](https://www.hiltonfoundation.org/programs/foster-youth#:~:text=For%20transition%20age%20youth%20(TAY,this%20can%20be%20especially%20true). Georgia law and Georgia Division of Family and Children Services policy do not distinguish between transition age youth, aging-out youth, or older youth in foster care.

<sup>3</sup> Children's Bureau Administration on Children, Youth and Families. (2023). *AFCARS Foster Care File, 6-month periods (FY2016A - 2022B)* [Data set]. National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN).

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* See [http://www.fosteringcourtimprovement.org/ga/County/discharges\\_summary.html](http://www.fosteringcourtimprovement.org/ga/County/discharges_summary.html).

<sup>5</sup> Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, Pub. L. No. 106-169, 113 STAT. 1822 (1999). See also Domestic Policy Council and Elena Kagan, "Family-Foster Care Initiative," Clinton Digital Library, accessed October 23, 2023, <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/26215>.

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<sup>6</sup> Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, Pub. L. No. 106-169, 113 STAT. 1822 (1999).

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, Child Welfare Manual, Policy No. 13.0: Introduction to the Independent Living Program (effective date Dec. 2014). Last accessed October 23, 2023.

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, Child Welfare Policy Manual No. 13.5, Individual Development Accounts (IDA) (effective date Jan. 2015). Last accessed October 23, 2023.

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, Child Welfare Manual, Policy No. 13.8: Driver Education, Licensure and State Identification (effective date Oct. 2015). Last accessed October 23, 2023.

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

<sup>19</sup> Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, Child Welfare Manual, Policy: Casey Life Skills Assessment (effective date Dec. 2014). Last accessed October 23, 2023; *see also* Casey Family Programs, Casey Life Skills Toolset, <https://www.casey.org/casey-life-skills/>. Last accessed December 18, 2023.

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*

<sup>22</sup> *Id.*

<sup>23</sup> The Chafee Act authorizes \$60 million annually to states to provide Education and Training Vouchers (ETVs) but has never received full appropriation. In 2021, the amount appropriated to states was only \$43,257,00, of which Georgia received \$1,343,537. FY 2022 Justification of Estimates for Appropriations Committees, DEP'T HEALTH & HUM. SERVS. (2022) at 221-222.

<sup>24</sup> 42 U.S.C.A. § 677(i)(4) (West); Adrienne L. Fernandes-Alcantara, John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood, IF11070, CONG. RSCH. SERV. (Apr. 19, 2021) (Under the Higher Education Act of 1965, the cost of attendance includes “the costs of tuition, fees, books, supplies, transportation, and childcare, among other expenses” and qualifying “institution[s] of higher education” include “traditional higher education institutions (e.g., public or private nonprofit colleges) as well as other postsecondary institutions (e.g., postsecondary vocational schools).”).

<sup>25</sup> About ETV, EMBARK GA. (last visited Nov. 2, 2022), <https://embarkgeorgia.org/etv/about>. Last accessed Oct. 23, 2023.

<sup>26</sup> *Id.*

<sup>27</sup> Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, Child Welfare Manual, Policy No. 13.11: Post Foster Care (PFC) Resources (effective date Dec. 2014). Last accessed Oct. 23, 2023.

<sup>28</sup> *Id.* at note 33; Georgia ETV 2023 Student Handbook, GA RYSE and DFCS. Created December 2022.

<sup>29</sup> Ga. Code Ann. § 20-3-660.

<sup>30</sup> *Id.* Because the powers of the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia are authorized by the Georgia Constitution, the Georgia General Assembly is limited in its ability to legislate its functions and therefore, could not mandate tuition waivers for public universities and colleges. *See* Ga. Const., art. IV.

<sup>31</sup> Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, Child Welfare Manual, Policy No. 13.4: Transition from Foster Care (effective date July 2021). Last accessed Oct. 23, 2023.

<sup>32</sup> Ga. Code Ann. § 15-11-201(b)(17); *see also* Ga. Code Ann. § 15-11-231(9)(E).

<sup>33</sup> Ga. Code Ann. § 15-11-201(b)(16).

<sup>34</sup> Pub. L. 106-169, 113 STAT. 1822, Sec. 121.

<sup>35</sup> *Id.* at Sec. 477(a)(1).

<sup>36</sup> *Id.* at Sec. 121.

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<sup>37</sup> Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, Child Welfare Policy Manual, No. 13.10, Medical Insurance for Youth 18 Years of Age and Older and the Georgia Advance Directive for Health Care (effective date Oct. 2015). Last accessed Oct. 23, 2023. *See also* <https://www.myamerigroup.com/ga/your-plan/georgia-families-360.html>.

<sup>38</sup> Georgia DFCS Policy No. 13.10, Medical Insurance for Youth 18 Years of Age and Older and the Georgia Advance Directive for Health Care, *infra* note 37.

<sup>39</sup> *Id.*

<sup>40</sup> *Id.*

<sup>41</sup> *Id.*

<sup>42</sup> Georgia DFCS Policy No. 13.11: Post Foster Care (PFC) Resources, *infra* note 27.

<sup>43</sup> *See generally* Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, Child Welfare Policy Manual, Policy No. 10.23: 13.01: Case Planning (effective date Oct. 2021). Last accessed Dec. 27, 2023.

<sup>44</sup> *See generally* Ga. Code Ann. § 15-11-201.

<sup>45</sup> Ga. Code Ann. § 15-11-231(9).

<sup>46</sup> Ga. Code Ann. § 15-11-201(16) and (17).

<sup>47</sup> Ga. Code Ann. § 15-11-201(b)(15)(C)(i).

<sup>48</sup> *Id.*

<sup>49</sup> Ga. Code Ann. § 15-11-201(b)(16).

<sup>50</sup> Frequently Asked Questions on the Provisions Designed to Impact Youth and Young Adults. National Foster Care Coalition. June 2009.  
[https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/publications/center\\_on\\_children\\_and\\_the\\_law/empowerment/nfcc\\_faq\\_olderyouth.authcheckdam.pdf](https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/publications/center_on_children_and_the_law/empowerment/nfcc_faq_olderyouth.authcheckdam.pdf). The number of youth aging out of foster care without a permanent, recognized family went from 20,000 in the 80s/90s, to 26,000 in 2006.

<sup>51</sup> *Id.*

<sup>52</sup> Frequently Asked Questions on the Provisions Designed to Impact Youth and Young Adults. National Foster Care Coalition. June 2009.  
[https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/publications/center\\_on\\_children\\_and\\_the\\_law/empowerment/nfcc\\_faq\\_olderyouth.authcheckdam.pdf](https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/publications/center_on_children_and_the_law/empowerment/nfcc_faq_olderyouth.authcheckdam.pdf).

<sup>53</sup> Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, Pub. L. No. 110- 351, 122 STAT. 3949 (2008).

<sup>54</sup> Frequently Asked Questions on the Provisions Designed to Impact Youth and Young Adults. National Foster Care Coalition. June 2009.  
[https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/publications/center\\_on\\_children\\_and\\_the\\_law/empowerment/nfcc\\_faq\\_olderyouth.authcheckdam.pdf](https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/publications/center_on_children_and_the_law/empowerment/nfcc_faq_olderyouth.authcheckdam.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> Ga. Code Ann. § 15-11-340(d).

<sup>56</sup> Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, Child Welfare Policy Manual, Policy No. 13.01: Eligibility and Enrollment (effective date Dec. 2014). Last accessed Oct. 23, 2023.

<sup>57</sup> *See* Ga. Code Ann. § 15-11-340(a).

<sup>58</sup> Georgia DFCS Policy No. 13.01: Eligibility and Enrollment, *infra* note 56.

<sup>59</sup> *Id.*

<sup>60</sup> Ga. Code Ann. § 15-11-340(b).

<sup>61</sup> *Id.*

<sup>62</sup> Ga. Code Ann. § 15-11-340(d).

<sup>63</sup> Ga. Code Ann. § 15-11-340(c).

<sup>64</sup> Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, Pub. L. No. 110- 351, 122 STAT. 3949 (2008).

<sup>65</sup> *Id.*

<sup>66</sup> Ga. Code Ann. §15-11-201(b)(12). *See also* Georgia DFCS Policy No. 10.23: 13.01: Case Planning, *infra* note 43.

<sup>67</sup> Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, Child Welfare Manual, Policy No. 10.13: Educational Needs (effective date Mar. 2022). Last accessed Oct. 23, 2023.

<sup>68</sup> Ga. Code Ann. § 20-2-152.2.

<sup>69</sup> *Id.*

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- <sup>70</sup> Ga. Code Ann. § 15-11-201(b)(17); *see also* Ga. Code Ann. § 15-11-231(9)(E).
- <sup>71</sup> *See* Ga. Code Ann. § 15-11-342(b).
- <sup>72</sup> *See* Ga. Code Ann. § 15-11-342(e).
- <sup>73</sup> Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, Child Welfare Manual, Policy No. 13.1: Written Transitional Living Plan (effective date Aug. 2016). Last accessed Dec. 27, 2023.
- <sup>74</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>75</sup> Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act, Pub. L. No. 113-34, 125 STAT. 373 (2011).
- <sup>76</sup> Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, Child Welfare Policy Manual No. 13.6, Credit Reports for Youth in Foster Care (effective date Oct. 2015). Last accessed October 23, 2023.
- <sup>77</sup> Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, Child Welfare Policy Manual, Policy No. 10.12: Psychological and Behavioral Health Needs (effective date Apr. 2020). Last accessed Dec. 18, 2023.
- <sup>78</sup> 42 U.S.C. § 675(10)(A).
- <sup>79</sup> 42 U.S.C. § 677(a)(7).
- <sup>80</sup> 42 U.S.C. § 675(11)(A).
- <sup>81</sup> 42 U.S.C. § 675.
- <sup>82</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>83</sup> Ga. Code Ann. § 49-5-8(11).
- <sup>84</sup> Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, Child Welfare Policy Manual, Policy No. 13.8: Driver Education, Licensure, and State Identification (effective date Oct. 2015). Last accessed Dec. 27, 2023.
- <sup>85</sup> *See id.*
- <sup>86</sup> Ga. Code Ann. § 15-11-109(c)(1)(C).
- <sup>87</sup> Ga. Code Ann. § 15-11-232(a)(9)(B).
- <sup>88</sup> Ga. Code Ann. § 49-5-3(16).
- <sup>89</sup> Ga. Code Ann. § 49-5-3(1).
- <sup>90</sup> *See* Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, Child Welfare Policy Manual, Policy No. 14.26: Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standard (effective date Oct. 2015). Last accessed Dec. 27, 2023.
- <sup>91</sup> Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, Child Welfare Policy Manual, Policy No. 1.13: Sex Trafficking Overview (effective date July 2019). Last accessed Dec. 26, 2023.
- <sup>92</sup> Ga. Code Ann. § 15-11-232(a)(9)(A).
- <sup>93</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>94</sup> Georgia DFCS Policy No. 10.23, *infra* note 43.
- <sup>95</sup> Ga. Code Ann. § 15-11-340(b).
- <sup>96</sup> Family First Prevention Services Act, Pub. L. 115-123, 132 STAT. 232.
- <sup>97</sup> *See id.*
- <sup>98</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>99</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>100</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>101</sup> Georgia DFCS Policy No. 13.01: Eligibility and Enrollment, *infra* note 56.
- <sup>102</sup> Family First Prevention Services Act, *infra* note 96.
- <sup>103</sup> About ETV, EMBARK GA. (last visited Nov. 2, 2022), <https://embarkgeorgia.org/etv/about>. Last accessed Oct. 23, 2023.
- <sup>104</sup> U.S. Department of Education. “Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA): A New Education Act”. <https://www.ed.gov/essa>. Last accessed Oct. 23, 2023.
- <sup>105</sup> United States Dep’t of Education, Office of Elementary & Secondary Education “Dear Colleague Letter on Implementation of Educational Stability Requirements”. <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/16-021539dclfostercare.pdf>. Last accessed Oct. 23, 2023.
- <sup>106</sup> Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, Pub. L. 114-95, 129 STAT. 1802.
- <sup>107</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>108</sup> Georgia DFCS Policy No. 10.13 Educational Needs, *infra* note 67.
- <sup>109</sup> Ga. Code Ann. §15-11-201(b)(12). *See also* Georgia DFCS Policy No. 10.23: 13.01: Case Planning, *infra* note 43.
- <sup>110</sup> Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, 111 P.L. 148, 124 STAT. 119 (2010).

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- <sup>111</sup> U.S. Dep’t of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, “Providing Medicaid to Youth Formerly in Foster Care Under the Chafee Option: Informing Implementation of the Affordable Care Act”. [https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/migrated\\_legacy\\_files//44071/rpt.pdf](https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/migrated_legacy_files//44071/rpt.pdf). Last accessed Oct. 23, 2023.
- <sup>112</sup> Georgia DFCS Policy No. 13.10, Medical Insurance for Youth 18 Years of Age and Older and the Georgia Advance Directive for Health Care, *infra* note 37.
- <sup>113</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>114</sup> Congressional Research Service, “Housing for Former Foster Youth: Federal Support” (March 2021). <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46734>. Last accessed Oct. 23, 2023.
- <sup>115</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>116</sup> U.S. DEPT. OF HOUS. AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, “Family Unification Program”. [https://www.hud.gov/program\\_offices/public\\_indian\\_housing/programs/hcv/family](https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/hcv/family). Last accessed Dec. 27, 2023.
- <sup>117</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>118</sup> U.S. DEPT. OF HOUS. AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, OFF. OF HOUS. VOUCHER PROGRAMS, “Fact Sheet Housing Choice Voucher Program Family Unification Program” (Jan. 2017). [https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/FUP\\_FACT\\_SHEET.PDF](https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/FUP_FACT_SHEET.PDF). Last accessed Oct. 23, 2023.
- <sup>119</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>120</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>121</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>122</sup> Housing and Urban Development Department, “Implementation of the Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Amendments” (Jan. 2022). <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2022/01/24/2022-01285/implementation-of-the-fostering-stable-housing-opportunities-amendments>. Last accessed Oct. 23, 2023.
- <sup>123</sup> Pub. L. 116-260.
- <sup>124</sup> Atlanta Housing, “Moving to Work Annual Plan: Final FY 2023”. <https://www.atlantahousing.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/HA-GA006-FY-2023-Ann.-MTW-Plan-Approved.pdf>. Last accessed Oct. 23, 2023.
- <sup>125</sup> Atlanta Housing, “Housing Choice Overview”. [https://www.atlantahousing.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/housing-choice-overview\\_09182020.pdf](https://www.atlantahousing.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/housing-choice-overview_09182020.pdf). Last accessed Oct. 23, 2023.
- <sup>126</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>127</sup> National - Youth Engagement Collective.