

October 29, 2021

The Honorable Representative Michael J. Finn
House Chair
Joint Committee on Children, Families, and
Persons with Disabilities

The Honorable Senator Adam Gomez
Senate Chair
Joint Committee on Children, Families, and
Persons with Disabilities

Dear Chair Finn, Chair Gomez, and Committee members,

The Children's League of Massachusetts (CLM) is a statewide non-profit association of over 60 private and public organizations and individuals that collectively advocate for public policies and quality services that are in the best interest of the Commonwealth's children, youth and families. It is through public education and advocacy that CLM promotes the availability, accessibility, and quality of these needed services. Our members, who comprise providers, advocates, and regulators of services, know first-hand the struggles that children and their families face in the Commonwealth.

In particular, our **Transition Age Youth Coalition** comprises experts in youth advocacy, homelessness, and foster care, as well as youth themselves, to improve supports and services for youth aging out of care without permanency.

We are writing to testify **in support of An act to ensure positive transition plans to prevent youth homelessness (H.248/S.85)**, which requires interdepartmental coordination to ensure any youth aged 14 or older who is in state care has a comprehensive plan to ensure successful transition from state care to independent adulthood. We must ensure youth who are exiting foster care without permanency are connected to every available resource to make a successful transition to adulthood, giving them the support to navigate all of the bumps and challenges this transition entails.

Current state and federal law require only that a youth have a transition plan with specific options regarding housing, education, health insurance, and employment/work force support.¹ However, we know that the transition to adulthood is both complex and ongoing, even for youth with all of the resources and supports of family and friends. For transition-age youth, the leap to adulthood can be both stark and complex, and the plan must reflect these complexities. Simple provision of a housing voucher may not be enough to ensure that a youth finds stable housing. Signing them up for health care may not ensure they connect to needed behavioral health, mental health, or substance abuse

¹ 42 U.S.C. § 675; MGL c. 119, § 29B(c)

treatment programs for adults. Comprehensive planning with input from the many departments providing essential services is crucial, not only to prevent youth from becoming homeless, to ensure that they can continue their education, enter the long-term workforce, and access health care; but also to provide them with other skills and supports to ensure life success including financial skills, mentoring relationships with caring adults, and access to other state and community-based resources when ongoing help is needed. Furthermore, this transition is not one-directional. We know that the road to independent adulthood is rocky for any young person and we cannot dictate their path; a youth may not be ready for available supports, or the requirements that come along with them, until they are few miles down the road. We need to ensure there is space and flexibility for them to return and access new elements of transition support when they are ready to receive it.

Just as crucially, this legislation requires that transition plans address any concerns and issues related to a youth's immigration status, a significant roadblock to success that youth simply cannot be expected to manage on their own. Youth who arrived in the U.S. as young children may not know the details of their status until it comes time to apply for a job or higher education; we cannot ask these youth to exit state care without this major roadblock to successful adulthood removed.

An important provision of this legislation is the inclusion of training and performance standards for court-appointed attorneys representing transition age youth on the transition plan process. In the experience of our members, these attorneys are not always fully knowledgeable about the expectations and requirements for transition planning, and may not have the deep relationships with the youth to know what is needed. Ensuring that all involved parties are collaborating to put every possible resource in place will help reinforce the transition planning, ensure shared accountability to appropriately supporting young people and promote greater success.

This bill is the very definition of the adage: "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." By investing in youth at this critical transition point, we avoid the long-term negative consequences of homelessness, unemployment, under-education and lack of job skills, lack of health care, and higher rates of involvement with the criminal justice system.

Finally, having removed these youth from their biological families and taken responsibility for them long term, it is imperative that the state see that responsibility through to its conclusion. That responsibility requires us to send youth into the adult world with all of the support and access to resources that any family would want for their own children. Youth exiting state care without permanency many lack someone to turn to when stumbling blocks arise; any mis-step is



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exponentially more challenging. A comprehensive transition plan widens the safety net that protects these young adults as they become adult members of our society.

We ask that you vote this bill out favorably and work diligently for its passage without delay.

Sincerely,

Tammy Mello
Executive Director
Children's League of Massachusetts

Endorsing Members of the CLM Transition Age Youth Coalition

18 Degrees
Friends of Children
Justice Resource Institute (JRI)
More Than Words
Roxbury Youthworks, Inc.
Wayside Youth & Family Support Network