September 9, 2020

Lourdes Padilla, Secretary
Maryland Social Services Administration
311 Saratoga Street
Baltimore, Maryland, 21201

Governor Larry Hogan
State of Maryland
100 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland, 21401

Dear Secretary Padilla and Governor Hogan:

We are a group of child welfare advocates concerned about the care of our state’s most vulnerable children and youth who are currently in out of home care.

We would like to start by thanking you for the tremendous leadership you have shown throughout the pandemic. Your concern for the health and well-being of our state’s residents has been evident throughout these challenging times. We appreciate the caution with which you’ve approached “re-opening,” and the recognition that individual county timelines must reflect local coronavirus impact.

We came together as a group because of our shared concerns regarding the impact of the crisis and some of the decisions being made by the Department of Human Services (DHS) as it relates to youth in foster care who are turning 21 and “aging out” of care during the pandemic. DHS has extended care for these youth on a month-by-month basis during the pandemic. While we appreciate this effort, this very limited incremental approach undermines the ability of youth in care and local departments of social services to effectively plan and prepare for discharge and causes considerable stress for youth. The current moratorium on discharging youth who are aging out of foster care is scheduled to end on September 30, 2020.

We are writing to request you issue an executive order that allows youth to remain in foster care after their 21st birthday and for at least 180 days after the last county in the state has fully re-opened.

Youth “aging out” of the system to live on their own are among the most vulnerable in our state, and unfortunately, the status of their vulnerability has increased during the pandemic and will continue to do so during this unprecedented time.

Findings from a recent survey by FosterClub¹ show the great needs youth who have aged out of foster care during this pandemic have. For example, among the young people surveyed:

- Over half have lost employment and income with nearly 65 percent who were working before the pandemic reporting losing employment.
- Nearly 1 in 5 report having run out of food.

¹ The Impact of COVID-19 on Youth from Foster Care A National Poll (FosterClub May 13, 2020).
• Nearly a quarter lack stable housing and fear homelessness, with 23% of young people reporting that they are being forced to move or leave their current living situation and many worrying they will lose their housing in the fall if it is tied to colleges and programs that do not re-open.
• More than half lack contact with a trusted adult who can support them, with Just 37% of the transition-aged youth from foster care having family members (legal or chosen) to rely on during the crisis and 1 in 5 youth reporting that they are entirely on their own.

Some states, like Illinois, have announced that young adults in foster care will be allowed to stay in care “until the pandemic crisis is over.” On April 24, Ohio’s governor, Mike DeWine, announced that “…the state will cover the costs of all these youth (aging out) until this pandemic ends”. South Carolina, too, has suspended age requirements to enable youth turning 21 during the pandemic to remain in their placement until after the “pandemic has ceased.” It is unconscionable that no comparable plan exists in a state with the resources that Maryland has.

In short, we urge you to quickly re-consider the policy forcing young adults who have turned 21 out of foster care and denying them housing and services. These are ‘our’ children and we owe them the best. Investing in Maryland’s young people to ensure they have access to stable housing and viable employment during the pandemic and beyond is not only the right choice for Maryland, it’s the only choice. ²

Sincerely,

Advocates for Children and Youth
Baltimore Child Abuse Center
Board of Child Care
Child Justice Inc
Citizens Review Board for Children
Court Appointed Special Advocates
Healthcare for the Homeless
Homeless Persons Representation Project
Maryland Association of Resources for Children and Youth
Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault
NARAL Pro Choice Maryland
National Association of Social Workers- Maryland Chapter
State Council on Child Abuse and Neglect
Student Homelessness Initiative Partnership of Frederick County
The Franklin Law Group

² According to Maryland DHS, If the moratorium were extended to December 31, 2020, this would impact 188 youth, at a cost of $1,591,664.