



national foster care coalition

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Guiding Principles for Implementation of the P.L. 110-351, Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoption Act of 2008 Provisions Addressing Older Youth

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act is landmark legislation that will promote significant new approaches aimed at improving the lives of youth and young adults currently in and transitioning out of foster care across America. While this new legislation contains a variety of provisions that will address the tremendous needs of children and youth and their caregivers, whether in foster care, kinship guardianship, or adoptive families, this document will focus on those provisions of the Act that impact older youth. In particular, the set of principles enumerated below reflects the collective views of the undersigned child welfare professionals, service agencies, academics and advocates in regard to essential elements that will help to ensure successful implementation of the Act to benefit older youth.

- **Emphasis on Permanency:** States' approach to extending support for older youth in foster care must demonstrate an ongoing commitment to permanency efforts, recognizing the critical importance of lifelong connections for every child and youth.
- **Youth as Engaged Participants and Key Decision Makers:** States should ensure that youth are engaged and informed participants in implementation efforts relating to the new Act, both at the policy and program levels as well in their individual case decisions. Youth should be supported in making well-informed decisions about their future, transition to adulthood, well-being, and other aspects of their case and permanency planning. This should include decisions about whether they want to continue receiving foster care supports. They should be engaged in any efforts related to planning for those services as well. Youth should also be notified of, present in, and encouraged to be active participants in all court and legal proceedings involving their case. Young people should have legal representation that enables them to have a supported voice in court.
- **Inclusive:** The goal of any state policy should be to ensure that every youth who needs support receives it. Conditions for participation should not exclude those youth who may be in the most need of support. States should extend support up to age 21 for all youth who opt to remain in care or have entered kinship guardianship or adoptive families.
- **Flexibility to Allow for Reentry:** States should adopt a flexible structure of supports for older youth that recognizes the individual needs of each young adult. In particular, states should allow for youth who

initially exit foster care at age 18 or beyond, to re-enter care if they choose, up to age 21. Youth should be informed of this opportunity, and the process for reentry, prior to their discharge from care.

- **Collaborative Approaches to Promote Health, Mental Health, Education, Housing and Workforce Readiness:** States' approaches to extending support for older youth in foster care, kinship guardianship or adoptive families must focus on the wide array of needs experienced by young people in the following areas: health and mental health, housing throughout the transition process, education and training (high school completion and graduation from college or training programs) and successful entry into the workforce. States should develop approaches to bring all the key agencies and service providers involved in these areas together and promote information sharing and collaborative efforts to enhance outcomes for youth transitioning into adulthood.
- **Developmentally Appropriate Services:** Placement options, service plans, case worker and court supervision and other services provided to youth after age 18 must be developmentally appropriate and reflect the needs of young adults, ages 18 to 21. Young adults must have age appropriate opportunities to develop living skills.
- **Evidence-based and Outcome Monitoring:** Support for older youth in foster care should build on key elements of proven practices and take into account tested and successful approaches. States and service providers should track outcomes and adjust policy and practice strategies based on proven results.

Special thanks to the following individuals for their contributions to *Guiding Principles for Implementation of the P.L. 110-351, Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoption Act of 2008 Provisions Addressing Older Youth*:

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Kathi M. Crowe, National Foster Care Coalition
Miriam Krinsky, American Bar Association,
Mark Kroner, Lighthouse Youth Services
David Laird, Voices for America's Children
Amy Lemley, John Burton Foundation
Carmela Welte, National CASA