



FosterClub

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Katy Otto, Juvenile Law Center, kotto@jlc.org, 240-478-9387

Advocacy Groups Launch #UpChafee Campaign To Urge Congress to Take Action for Youth in Foster Care During the COVID-19 Crisis

Coalition includes FosterClub, Juvenile Law Center, Youth Villages, and Youth Law Center

Washington, DC (April 3, 2020) -- Child welfare advocates, policy partners, and young people have come together to launch a campaign to highlight the urgent needs of youth in and aging out of foster care during the COVID-19 crisis. Advocates and young people urge Congress to ensure young people transitioning to adulthood in foster care are able to survive the hardships caused by the crisis by increasing funding for transition-age youth programs and services in the next stimulus bill and providing flexibility in the supports available to these youth such as extended foster care.

During a time when many young people are able to rely on their families for support, youth in foster care must rely on the child welfare system to ensure their safety, health, and well-being. "Congress has acted swiftly to send relief to our medical and emergency responders. We're already hearing of the significant impact on the foster care system and the vulnerable children it protects. We urge Congress to respond quickly to forestall a child welfare crisis on top of the existing COVID crisis," said Celeste Bodner, Executive Director of FosterClub.

Jenny Pokempner of Juvenile Law Center said, "Without targeted support, youth who reach adulthood in foster care during the COVID-19 crisis are at high risk for homelessness, lack of income, instability and illness. We should provide young people extra support during this time and we need to reach as many youth as possible."

The federal funding for programs and services provided to states for older youth in foster care comes through the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood. Although expenses for young adults across the nation have

skyrocketed, funding for Chafee remained at \$140 million since its enactment in 1999 and only increased to \$143 million this year. Additionally, eligibility for supports such as extended foster care that prevent homelessness and support educational completion must be flexible to respond to current systemic barriers to youth seeking employment and education.

The #UpChafee Campaign asks for immediate help immediate to youth for housing, food and critical supportive programs and services in the states and creates a crucial safety net.

“FosterClub’s survey of transition aged youth shows that the immediate need of young people is great: almost 40% are facing housing instability, 27% are facing food insecurity, and 27% had been laid off and 39% had their work hours cut,” said Bodner.

Advocates urge Congress to take action to meet the needs of these young people during this crisis by:

- **Increasing the investment in youth by providing Chafee funds to the amount of \$500 million.** Chafee funds can be used to support youth in and aging out of foster care until age 23 to address immediate needs such as housing and food. They can also be used to help youth plan their future and connect with vital community resources. The current allocation of funds does not meet the needs of youth. An increase to 500 million would allow states to provide assistance to youth immediately.
- **Providing flexibility to key programs that aid transition aged youth so that more youth can be served for longer periods of time.** Congress should waive the work and education requirements for transition age youth in Title IV-E extended foster care. The help they need shouldn’t be contingent on work and education during this crisis. Congress should also extend IV-E reimbursement until a youth turns 22, so that states can provide needed services and not discharge youth during the crisis.

Child welfare advocacy organizations, youth in and leaving foster care, and caseworkers urge action to create a social safety net that supports young people transitioning out of foster care during this time of crisis. This unprecedented crisis requires extraordinary responsive federal action to meet the specific needs of transition aged youth in foster care.

###