

Foster Youth to Independence Vouchers in California: The Role of Judges

1. What is the Foster Youth to Independence Housing Voucher Program?

The Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Program provides a type of housing choice voucher for young people who are leaving or have left foster care. These vouchers were developed to improve housing security for youth aging out of foster care. FYI was designed by young people who were in foster care and experienced homelessness after aging out. These vouchers can be requested by Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) when they collaborate with local child welfare agencies of probation departments. The PHA will provide the voucher and the child welfare agency provides or arranges for support services for the young person. These support services are voluntary. FYI vouchers last for three years, but can be extended for two additional years if the young adult is participating in the [Family Self Sufficiency Program](#) (FSS) or similar programs. These are programs that support employment, education, and incentivize saving.

2. Who is eligible for an FYI voucher?

Eligible youth (including probation supervised foster youth) meet the following criteria.

- Are 18 through 24 years of age (have not reached their 25th birthday), and
- Have left foster care, or will leave foster care within 90 days, and
- Are homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless when they were age 16 or older.

3. How does the FYI program benefit young people?

Stable housing is crucial for young people to successfully transition to adulthood. Without stable housing, young adults face significant challenges to meet their education and employment goals. But young people aging out of foster care face many barriers to securing safe and affordable housing, including their age and lack of family support, which many young adults rely on for their first apartment. The FYI program can be a critical stepping stone for young adults as they move from foster care into the adult world.

4. What is the role of judges in helping young adults secure stable housing by accessing FYI vouchers?

Judges can help ensure that young people in their community access FYI vouchers as part of their role in overseeing the transition planning process and as a key child welfare leader who can bring important stakeholders together.

In individual cases, judges should:

- Oversee the transition planning process, which begins at age 14, at permanency review hearings, and ensure that the plan contains a thoughtful and concrete plan for housing that includes a consideration of all options such as FYI.
- Order that the child welfare agency or probation department make a referral to the Housing Authority(ies) in the county for an FYI voucher be made as early as possible in the transition planning process and ask for frequent updates. While the PHA can request an FYI voucher from HUD as early as 90 days before a youth

leaves care, the child welfare agency can be preparing the case months in advance of 90 days before discharge and begin activities like: gathering vital documents, preparing the information needed for the Housing Choice Voucher application, and searching for a unit.

- Order that the child welfare agency assist the youth in completing any applications required by the Housing Authority.
- Refuse to discharge the youth's case (if the youth is in agreement) in accordance with the law if the youth does not have an adequate housing plan and the child welfare agency has not made a referral for an FYI voucher or assisted the youth in moving forward with a referral; request frequent updates on the status of the referral.

If the county child welfare agency or probation department has not yet implemented the FYI program, judges should:

- Require the county child welfare agency and probation department to report to the court on a quarterly basis the number of young people who leave both systems who are homeless or are housing insecure.
- Convene a meeting between the child welfare agency and probation department and Housing Authorities located in the county to facilitate collaboration to implement FYI.
- Use the leadership role of the court to encourage the involvement of community-based agencies that can provide and connect young people with voluntary support services.

For more information on FYI, see [here](#).