

PRESERVING FOSTER CHILDREN'S FEDERAL BENEFITS

Toolkit for Congress

THE PROBLEM

Up to 80k

Foster youth who are disabled or have a deceased parent are either receiving or may be eligible for Social Security or other federal benefits

\$16,031

Average amount of benefits that accrue to each impacted foster youth beneficiary

Federal and state law require that these benefits – the private property of the child – be used to meet the child's unmet current needs or saved for their future needs. Yet most foster care agencies routinely apply for and then covertly intercept foster youth's benefits to supplant their own fiscal obligations, providing no additional benefit to the child. Most impacted foster youth will never know about their benefits or see a dollar of their money as they struggle to achieve self-sufficiency.

CURRENT OUTCOMES ARE DISMAL & COSTLY

In addition, disabled youth are projected to earn an additional 37% less than their non-disabled peers over their lifetimes.

40%
face homelessness
within 2 years of
leaving care

<3%
obtain a
bachelor's
degree

71%
of young women
will be pregnant
by age 21

43%
are
unemployed at
age 21* AECF

Costs avoided if young people transitioning from foster care had outcomes similar to non-foster care peers: **\$4.1 BILLION**

POLICY REFORM CHANGES LIVES

ONE CHILD'S BENEFITS (\$16K) AMOUNTS TO:



10.4 MONTHS RENT FOR A ONE BEDROOM¹



2.8 YEARS COST OF COMMUTING TO WORK²



1.6 YEARS TUITION AT PUBLIC STATE UNIVERSITY³



1.4 YEARS OF CHILDCARE⁴

¹ The average monthly rent in the United States for a one-bedroom as of October 2025 is \$1,630.

² The average commuter pays \$5,748.50 annually to commute to work in 2023.

³ The average annual cost of tuition and required fees for a first-year college student at a public in-state school in 2022-2023 is \$9,834.

⁴ The national average price for childcare in July 2023 is \$11,582.

THE SOLUTION

Congress must act to ensure foster children actually benefit from their benefits. This is how:

Prohibit foster care agency from using benefits to offset care obligations

Conserve child's benefits to address child's unmet current needs or to prepare for future needs

Notify youth, parents, and child's attorney or GAL

Educate stakeholders and provide financial literacy training to youth

Screen foster youth for federal benefit eligibility upon entry and annually thereafter

Lived Experience Priority:

Apply for benefits when a child is eligible

Refund impacted youth whose benefits were misused

Account for use of child's benefit

LEARN MORE, TAKE ACTION

Enact federal reforms that promote economic stability for foster youth beneficiaries and prevent poor and costly outcomes for taxpayers across the nation:

- **Review past Congressional attempts** to comprehensively address this issue
- **Review State-Based Reforms:** [See our interactive map](#)
- **Advance Model Reform:** like [Arizona](#) and [District of Columbia](#), which address most of the key elements of a model law
 - See the Center for Rights of Abused Children's [Toolkit for Preservation of Youth Benefits](#) for state templates, letters, talking points and other tips
 - See [Elements of a Model Law](#)
- **Learn** [more about this issue and reform efforts](#)
- **Keep Current:** view [national and local news](#) including coverage by the following outlets:



"I never thought that the system that was supposed to be helping me really was stealing from me the entire time."

~ Antonio L.J., MN



Children's Advocacy Institute
www.caichildlaw.org