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Comparative Analysis of State Policies for Former Foster Youth

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An Honors College Project Presented to

the Faculty of the Undergraduate

College of Arts and Letters

James Madison University

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by Erin Alexis Watkins

April 2020

Accepted by the faculty of the Department of Justice Studies, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors College.

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**Abstract**

This research is a comparative analysis of state policies aiding former foster youth in their transition into adulthood. This research looks at policies in the areas of housing, education, and employment. The objective of this research is to see what state policies are effective in aiding their former foster youth in their transition into adulthood. Effectiveness is evaluated by the National Youth in Transition Database data and Annie E. Casey Foundation data, looking specifically at rates of homelessness, rates of enrollment or attendance in school, and rates of part-time or full-time employment. Results found that the three states analyzed (Illinois, Virginia, and New York) all have fairly effective policies. Different states have different strong suits (Illinois has great homelessness prevention and Virginia exceeds the national standard under employment) but overall, they are all effective policies.

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### **Acknowledgments**

I would like to sincerely thank the Honors College for allowing me such wonderful educational opportunities and opportunities to grow as a young person. Thank you to the Justice Studies Department for engaging students in diverse and intriguing classes and content. I will carry these lessons of justice with me for a long time after I part from James Madison University. I am indebted to Dr. Sue Spivey, better known as Suey, for her patience and guidance through a new process. Thank you for empowering me to accomplish my dreams and listening to me intently. I am also grateful to have Dr. Peggy Plass and Beth DeLullo as my faculty readers; thank you for your time in reading my works in progress and helping this research become the best it could be. Thank you to my family who has believed in my every step of the way. I could not have done this without all your encouragement and guidance.

### **Literature Review**

In the United States today, roughly 400,000 kids are in foster care. About 20,000 of these kids are freed from foster care due to age (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). United States policymakers began to see the need to help former foster youth in their transition into adulthood starting with the Social Security Act. In its amendments in 1986, Title IV-E helped create the Independent Living Program (ILPs). ILPs were to provide educational and vocational support, as well as life skills training to former foster youth before they transition into adulthood. These programs would be the foundation of continued support into their early adult years (Courtney, 2011). States received funding to provide for former foster youth with independent living services, such as providing housing, educational opportunities, and employment opportunities. Federal support was intensified with the creation of the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program in 1999. This policy increased funding to 140 million dollars a year, expanded the age range eligible for services, provided a wider range of services, and granted states the option to extend Medicaid benefits to former foster youth until they are 21 years old (Courtney, 2011). The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 amended Title IV-E of the Social Security Act to extend the age of eligibility from 18 to 21 (Courtney, 2011).

States are given the authority and funding to aid former foster youth through the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program. While the policy implementation visualizes the hopes of states, the chief executive officer of each state has control over where and how funds are allocated (SSA,2018). Therefore, all states policies look differently based on state's economy, demographics, and needs. States with effective policies to aid former foster youth in the areas of stabilizing housing, improving educational opportunities, and securing employment

are the most helpful in aiding former foster youth through their transition (Havlicek, 2014; Dworsky, 2016; Brown, 2010; Courtney, 2011; Osgood, 2010). Havlicek mentions that the primary three things that caseworkers look for in an assessment of former foster youth are housing, education levels, and job status. Young adults with security and stability in these three areas will be more likely to live successful and productive lives.

## **Education**

Acquiring an education, specifically post-secondary education, has significant benefits. Education has a considerable influence over one's quality of life. It also can determine one's economic, social, and civic benefits within a society (Day, 2012). Having a college education is associated with better physical health, more purposeful employment, and higher socioeconomic status (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). College graduates tend to earn more, on average, than their high school counterparts. College graduates also tend to be more civically engaged amongst their communities (Day, 2012).

However, former foster youth are less likely to graduate high school than their peers, as well as attend and graduate from college if they have previously graduated from high school. In 2001, Burley and Halpern found that 59% of foster youth in Washington state graduated on time whilst their counterparts who are not in foster care had an 86% on time graduation rate. Low high school graduation rates could be caused by poverty, abuse and neglect, behavioral and emotional problems that occurred before or during a foster care placement. During the placement, education can also be disrupted by placement changes and school changes (Burley and Halpern, 2001).



Under the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, former foster youth can receive an educational and training voucher of up to \$5,000, which would be considerable help in pursuing some level of tertiary education considering the indebted costs of colleges and universities in the United States (SSA, 2018). They remain eligible for these educational funds until they are 23 years of age and if they are making satisfactory progress towards the completion of that degree or program (SSA, 2018). Education seems to be the top priority under this policy compared to housing and employment.

### **Housing**

Youth transitioning out of foster care and into adulthood need more support and need to learn independent living skills to aid their transition (Day, 2012). The Family Unification Program study has found that former foster youth may need housing assistance for as long as a decade (Dworky, 2016). Youth who have been involved in Independent Living Programs (ILPs) or transitional houses have had positive outcomes. These include more job participation, higher hourly wages, higher levels of school enrollment, and lower levels of involvement in the criminal justice system (Dworsky, 2016).

Unstable housing could stall efforts to become more self-sufficient in education or in a job (Day, 2012). And while states have a responsibility (on paper through the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program) to provide independent living services through age 21, the poor economic circumstances of youth who leave foster care combined with the instability of their housing undermine the services provided from this policy (Osgood, 2010). Again, the Independence Program hands power and funding over to states to distribute money and implement effective programs that will provide housing to former foster youth.

Homelessness is one issue in terms of housing instability. The National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) tracks former foster youth in terms of housing, employment, education, and a few other facets (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). One of the most shocking factors seen in this data is the experiences with homelessness report. It shows in 49 states (all states besides Illinois) are experiencing double-digit percentages of homelessness for former foster youth by age 21. This seriously impedes the development and transition of these youth.

### **Employment**

Employment is tracked by the NYTD and other researchers because of the need for financial independence for former foster youth. This proves to be a great challenge for these youth, however, the benefits of financial independence are worth it (Osgood, 2010). Financial independence allows these youth to secure basic needs, such as food, clothes, and shelter on their own.

Policies aid these former foster youth with employment opportunities. These opportunities vary state by state under the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program. This variation is evident by the reporting number of the NYTD for part-time or full-time employment. The NYTD surveys foster youth and former foster youth at ages 17, 19, and 21. Employment rates increase as the age of the surveyee increases in every state (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). However, rates vary for employment as low as 41% to as high as 83%. It is important that states make employment policies and programs a priority for former foster youth to help them achieve financial freedom and independence.

While there are services to aid these youth to make the transition into adulthood, not all former foster youth have received the services for which they are eligible (Courtney, 2011). Even amongst those who can receive these services, there are few reports on the effectiveness of the policies in place (Courtney, 2011). In this paper, state policies in Illinois, Virginia, and New York will be compared to see various implementation strategies and thus, various results.

## **Methodology**

In attempting to answer which state policies are best for allowing young adults to transition from foster care to adulthood, this study utilizes a comparative case study. Researching a small number of cases allows for the study to see causal explanations of variation between two or more closely matched units of analysis (Druckman, 2005). The goal of case studies is to discover the differences, similarities, and patterns across cases (Campbell, 2012). Comparative cases can also check the variation in program or policy implementation. As this study seeks to determine what state policies are best for adulthood transitioning regarding housing, education, and employment, this comparative study will focus on 3 U.S. states: Illinois, Virginia, and New York.

The states chosen all fall under the U.S. policies regarding former foster youth and subsequently have their own state policies to aid the transition of former foster youth. Illinois was chosen because of its remarkable progress in helping former foster youth transition based on the NYTD data, specifically for combatting homelessness (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). Virginia was chosen because that is where this research is being studied, but also because Virginia's numbers are among the average across the nation based on this same data when looking at housing, education, and employment. New York was chosen because they heavily participate (97% participation rate) in federally funded transition services (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2018).

To ensure a comprehensive design, it is imperative to study the policies behind the NYTD data, not just the data. This study will look at both state's history of dealing with former foster youth and the policies that have been put in place over time. There are many factors at

play in the transition from childhood to adulthood, but for the purposes of this study we will focus on housing, education, and employment policies regarding former foster youth.

The following questions will be asked in regard to all states policies:

- Is stable housing made available to former foster youth?
- Is homelessness a threat to many former foster youths in this state as compared to the national average based on NYTD data and Annie E. Casey Foundation data?
- Do education policies in the state allow more students to graduate from high school or receive a GED at a higher rate than the national average based on Annie E. Casey Foundation data?
- Is there state funding made easily available for former foster youth who want to attend college or trade school?
- Do employment policies in the state allow for more former foster youth to be employed than the national average based on NYTD data and Annie E. Casey Foundation data?
- Are there employment programs available that teach former foster youth marketable skills that could lead to long-term success in the workforce?

These questions were chosen because they assess the three categories, we are looking at within these state policies (housing, education, and employment). These questions also assess finances. In their childhood, foster youth are supplemented through the government (money which is given to their foster parents). In order to transition into adulthood, it is important that these youth can be financially independent of their former foster parents and (eventually) government subsidies.

## **Illinois**

This chapter will be exploring Illinois' history of policies regarding former foster youth- specifically in the areas of housing, education, and employment. Policies will be followed up with data from the National Youth in Transition Database to assess the effectiveness of these policies.

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) was established on January 1, 1964. It was the first cabinet-level state child welfare agency in the United States (Illinois DCFS, 2020). Before the implementation of DCFS, most child welfare responsibilities were taken care of by the Department of Mental Health; services were very limited. In the first year of operation, 4,000 children were served. Illinois has been referred to as the birthplace of social work with Jane Addams' Hull House. It was the first state with a juvenile court. It was among the first states to establish child protection laws and created one of the U.S.'s first statewide child abuse hotlines.

The mission of Illinois' Department of Children and Family Services is "to protect children who are reported to be abused or neglected and to increase their families' capacity to safely care for them; provide for the well-being of children in care; provide appropriate, permanent families as quickly as possible for those children who cannot safely return home; support early intervention and child abuse prevention activities and work in partnerships with communities to fulfill this mission."

### **Establishment of Juvenile Justice Court**

The Illinois Juvenile Court Act of 1899 created the first juvenile court in the United States (Wilson, 2017). Prior to 1899, children in trouble with the law in Illinois, and every other

state in the United States, would appear in the same courts as adults- oftentimes charged similarly. This new court system was rooted in the belief that there are greater chances of reformation for children than adults. Advocates for this new court believed that children needed to be corrected but protected, not punished (Wilding, 2011). By 1945, every state would have a juvenile court.

### **Illinois Department of Children and Family Services- Housing**

One helpful resource for former foster youth in Illinois in regard to housing is the Illinois Housing Handbook. This 80-page handbook is a great guide to anything housing related for former foster youth (Illinois DCFS, 2019). Illinois DCFS helped write this handbook to help simplify the housing and renting processes for their youth. The handbook also offers advice in financial planning and job searching. This handbook is accessible online through Illinois DCFS's website or through DCFS offices across the state. Highlighted below are the major themes and areas of assistance offered in the handbook

#### Types of Housing

- Private Renting Markets accounts for the majority of housing options. Landlords determine the price of a property. This price is based on location, amenities, quality of the space, and number of rooms. The general rule is to not spend more than 30% of income on housing.
- The only emergency housing available are emergency shelters. The affordable housing process can take weeks.
- Housing Choice Vouchers (also known as Section 8 housing) allows eligible persons to reduce the cost of their rent. HCV are popular and the waiting lists are long. The most

important eligibility criteria is that the applicant must have a very low income. Many former foster youths apply.

- Similarly, public housing is available to those with a very low income. They are also popular, and the waiting lists are long. The biggest difference between the two are the way the buildings are inspected, the exact income needed to qualify, and public housing is owned by the local housing authority.
- Project Based Subsidized housing is similar to public housing, except this subsidized housing is owned by private property owners.
- Other housing services include Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) and Rapid Rehousing Program (RRHP). Friends and family can also be a great resource.

#### Homeless Assistance Services

- In 2013, Illinois became the second state (after Rhode Island) to enact a Bill of Rights for the Homeless law, which established a basic list of rights of homeless people, to protect them from discrimination. Some of these rights include keeping one's job despite having no permanent address, accessing emergency medical care, right to vote, protecting records and information, and moving freely in public spaces and using transit systems.
- If former foster youth need services to prevent homelessness, they should contact their local Continuum of Care (CoC). Local-level CoC are often the organizers of interim housing and emergency shelters in each area. Sometimes they have permanent supportive housing programs in place. Some emergency housing options that can be provided are shelters (reentry, emergency, and transitional), Homeless youth agencies, and the Youth Housing Assistance Program (YHAP).



## Housing Search

- Location is important, one must consider transportation, proximity to the place of employment, friends, and local CoC, and proximity to grocery stores, pharmacies, and laundry mats. The Fair Housing Act prohibits housing discrimination based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, family size, or disability. If former foster youth feel as though these rights have been violated, they can (and should) file a complaint on the HUD website. Important things to look at when inspecting an apartment or home are appliances, common areas, electricity, exits, heating, plumbing, and security.

## Tenant's Rights and Responsibilities

- Tenant is a word that describes someone who lives on property owned by a landlord. As a tenant, there are certain responsibilities that should account for, such as:
  - Demand a written lease
  - Pay rent on time
  - Keep the rental unit clean and undamaged. If there are damages, you are responsible.
  - Pay utilities on time

## Other Health and Safety Considerations

- Some other health considerations include clean water, lead paint, air quality, poisonous gases.

## Eviction

- A landlord must take them to court and get an order from a judge to evict. If a landlord locks them out of your apartment, their landlord is acting illegally, and they should call the police. The best way to prevent an eviction is to follow the terms of the lease and pay rent on time every month. There are various types of notices, be sure to implore which type yours is (5-day, 10-day, 30 day, or 90 day).

## Foreclosure

- A landlord is responsible for paying the bank on the building where they live. If they stop paying their mortgage, the bank may take ownership of the building. In this situation, renters have rights.

This is just a brief overview of the various rights, tips, and tricks that are offered by Illinois DCFS to inform former foster youth of how to act in a housing situation.

Illinois DCFS finds it important to promote independence and self-sufficiency amongst their youth. “All young people, and especially those who have spent time in the child welfare system, need to connect with individuals who believe in them and key resources that are available to them.” This quote is on the Illinois DCFS website. To achieve this goal, Illinois DCFS promotes the Service Provider Identification and Exploration Resource (SPIDER) as a free and comprehensive service resource. SPIDER connects you to nearby organizations, services, and resources to support children and their families. Specific information is highlighted on mental health resources, housing resources, caregiver support, educational advocacy, job training, and mentoring (Illinois DCFS, 2020).

The National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) collects information on foster youth and former foster youth every year. The NYTD was established from the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program at section 477 of the Social Security Act (U.S. Health and Human Services, 2019). This law requires that Administration for Children and Families develop a data collection system to track independent living services provided to foster youth and former foster youth. The law also requires the development outcome measures to evaluate a state’s performance in operating independent living programs. Failure to report can result in a state penalty of one to five percent of the state’s annual allotment (U.S. Health and Human Services, 2019).

In regard to housing, the NYTD collects data on foster youth and former foster youth experiencing homelessness. Foster youth are surveyed at ages 17, 19, and 21. At age 17, they are asked if they have ever experienced homelessness. At ages 19 and 21, they are asked if they have experienced homelessness in the previous two years. Here are the results from years 2014-2018.

**Percent Reporting Experiences with Homelessness**

|                 | Age 17<br>FY 2014 | Age 19<br>FY 2016 | Age 21<br>FY 2018 |
|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Illinois</b> | 14%               | 14%               | 7%                |

Figure 1. NYTD data on youth experiencing homeless in Illinois.

**Percent Reporting Experiences with Homelessness**

|                 | Age 17<br>FY 2014 | Age 19<br>FY 2016 | Age 21<br>FY 2018 |
|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>National</b> | 17%               | 20%               | 29%               |

Figure 2. NYTD data on youth experiencing homelessness nationally.

We can see from this data that Illinois falls far below the national average of former foster youth experiencing homelessness. In fact, Illinois is the only U.S. state or territory that has

a single-digit homelessness rate for this population. This can be attributed to their extensive handbook and various other resources that set up former foster youth for success.

### **Illinois Department of Children and Family Services- Education**

A post-high school educational advantage that Illinois offers is state tuition waivers. State tuition waiver programs allow students to attend publicly funded higher education colleges and universities by “waiving” (relinquish or excuse) tuition and fees such as room, board, books, etc. under certain criteria (Williams-Mbengue, 2020). The waiver may cover in-state tuition at public institutions or colleges. The waivers may provide a reduced rate or cover the full tuition and fees. Illinois covers partial tuition through the Educational and Training Voucher (ETV) and former foster youth must apply to receive these funds. Illinois is one of twenty-two states that use tuition waivers to support young people transitioning from foster care and one of nine states that offer grants or scholarships to youth aging out of foster care. Illinois will continue to provide educational funding and resources until age 23.

As a part of Illinois DCFS’ initiative to promote independence and self-sufficiency, DCFS offers educational opportunities to children previously involved in the child welfare system. This opportunity is the DCFS Academic Internship Program. This program offers internships statewide to degree-seeking college students with learning opportunities within the child welfare system. This internship is offered to any college student who is pursuing a bachelor’s or master’s degree.

NYTD data on education records the percent of former foster youth currently enrolled and attending school. This could be high school, a GED program, or post-secondary education.

**Percent Reporting Being Enrolled in and Attending School**

|                 | Age 17<br>FY 2014 | Age 19<br>FY 2016 | Age 21<br>FY 2018 |
|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Illinois</b> | 92%               | 49%               | 27%               |

Figure 3. NYTD data on youth who report being enrolled in and attending school in Illinois

**Percent Reporting Being Enrolled in and Attending School**

|                 | Age 17<br>FY 2014 | Age 19<br>FY 2016 | Age 21<br>FY 2018 |
|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>National</b> | 93%               | 52%               | 28%               |

Figure 4. NYTD data on youth who report being enrolled in and attending school nationally

Illinois’ percentages are very similar to the national percentages of youth being enrolled in school. This can be attributed to several factors. While there are various benefits to continuing education, youth may have a desire or need to be working and receiving an income. Although Illinois does offer tuition waivers, some youth may not want to continue their education, or may want to work for a while to discover what they want to study.

**Illinois Department of Children and Family Services- Employment**

Illinois DCFS offers insight into various employment programs and opportunities through their promoting independence and self-sufficiency page. They describe that finding and keeping a job are defining times in a youth’s life. Employment allows one to have money in their pocket, build confidence and self-esteem, as well as develop work habits imperative to move towards independence.

Here are some of the programs offered through Illinois DCFS:

- Employment Incentive Program (EIP) is designed to provide financial services to aid eligible youth and help them gain marketable skills through work experience, job training programs, and apprenticeships. Youth must be in the care of DCFS or formerly in care of

DCFS and between the ages of 17 and 20. Youth also must be working 20 hours a week (or 80 hours a month).

- Find Your Future (FYF) Internship Program is a 10-week paid internship program that matches current and/or former youth in child welfare services with employers that match their interests, skills, or studies.
- Hire the Future (HTF) through the Illinois Department of Employment Security program is designed for young adults from ages 16 to 24 to aid the transition into adulthood and the workplace. HTF allows youth a taste of the workplace environment and what is required of them prior to and during employment.
- Mentoring Youth to Inspire Meaningful Employment (MY TIME) is a job readiness and employment program specifically for former foster youth. Participants will learn employment obtainment and retention skill and preparing for success in their careers. MY TIME is open for youth between the ages of 17 to 20.
- YouthBuild programs allow low-income youth to work full-time towards their GEDs or high school diplomas while learning job skills. After the program, youth can be placed in college, jobs, or both.

NYTD data records percentages of youth with part- or full-time employment statuses.

**Percent Reporting Being Employed Part- or Full-time**

|          | Age 17<br>FY 2014 | Age 19<br>FY 2016 | Age 21<br>FY 2018 |
|----------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Illinois | 18%               | 47%               | 62%               |

Figure 5. NYTD data on youth who report being employed part or full-time in Illinois

**Percent Reporting Being Employed Part- or Full-time**

|                 | Age 17<br>FY 2014 | Age 19<br>FY 2016 | Age 21<br>FY 2018 |
|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>National</b> | 14%               | 40%               | 57%               |

Figure 6. NYTD data on youth who report being employed part- or full-time nationally.

Illinois’ percentages are slightly higher than the national average at all ages reported. This can be attributed to the number of programs that are offered to former foster youth. They have ample opportunities to be employed, which will allow them to be more self-sufficient and independent citizens.

In conclusion, Illinois does exceedingly well across the board (especially in housing and employment programs and policies). Illinois DCFS’ emphasis on self-sufficiency and independence has allowed for effective programs to be established. These programs have led a to higher percentage of former foster youth to have housing, attend school, and be employed. Other states would greatly benefit from understanding Illinois’ programs and implementing them to best serve former foster youth.

Below is a graph created by the Annie E. Casey Foundation that highlights the services used by New York compared to the national averages (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2018).

Services

Transition services, such as vocational training and housing assistance, are designed to help young people with foster care experience transition to adulthood. Participation in federally funded transition services provides a window into how well young people are being equipped for employment, education and housing.

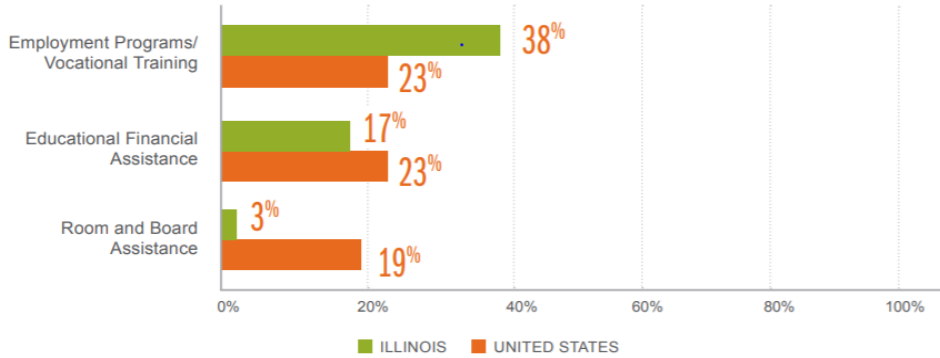


Figure 7. Annie E. Casey Foundation Services Allocation for Illinois

The graph shows that Illinois use of federally funded transition services varies in different areas. Illinois relies on federally funded transitional services more heavily than the national average for their employment programs but does not use much of the federally funded services for room and board. However, in both of those areas, Illinois exceeds the national averages based on the 2018 NYTD data.



## Virginia

This chapter will be exploring Virginia's history of policies regarding former foster youth in the areas of housing, education, and employment. Policies will be followed up with data from the National Youth in Transition Database and the Annie E. Casey Foundation to assess the effectiveness of these policies.

The state of Virginia has attempted to deal with issues relating to public welfare since the mid-1600s (General Assembly of Virginia, 2005). Then they created a child welfare program and a workhouse for the provisional care of poor children. Fast forward to 1908 when the Virginia General Assembly the State Board of Charities and Corrections, where this board surveyed the state's jails, other correctional facilities, and homes for the poor and disabled (Bottom, 1909). The Reorganization Act of 1922 gave this board more responsibility and renamed it the State Board of Public Welfare. This act also created a juvenile and domestic relations court, a trained social worker, and a board of interested citizens. The 1938 Virginia Public Assistance Act ensured the establishment of local departments of social services; while some already existed, this act solidified the necessity of these local departments. The growing magnitude of programs and the national emphasis on an end to poverty led to the creation of regional offices to assist localities in the 1960s. In 1982, the General Assembly renamed the Department of Welfare to the Department of Social Services. Today, Virginia's social services serves the state through 120 local departments to provide benefits to those who are unable to support themselves, promoting self-sufficiency, enhancing child and adult welfare and safety, and improving family stability (General Assembly of Virginia, 2005). The mission of the Virginia Department of Social Services is "to design and deliver high-quality human services that help Virginians achieve safety, independence, and overall well-being" (Virginia Department of Social Services, 2020).

As mentioned in the Literature Review, the 2008 Fostering Connections Act allows states to use title IV-E funding to extend foster care services up to 21 years of age for youth who turn 18 years of age while in foster care. In Virginia, the 2016 Appropriations Act authorized the extension of foster care to 21 years of age (Virginia Department of Social Services, 2019). This program is called Fostering Futures. In order to be in Fostering Futures, one must have been in foster care in custody of a Virginia LDSS when they turned 18 years old. In order to continue to be a part of Fostering Futures, one must meet at least five of the following criteria: completing secondary education or a program leading to a GED, enrolled full-time or part-time in an institution providing postsecondary education or vocational education, participating in a program designed to promote employment or remove barriers to employment, employed at least 80 hours a month, or incapable of engaging in any of the above activities due to a medical condition.

### **Virginia Department of Social Services- Housing**

According to the VDSS Fostering Futures manual, local Department of Social Services should offer independent living services to all youth who turn 18 and are in the process of transitioning from foster care to adulthood. Services provided are based on a life skills assessment, which is conducted to assess the strengths and needs of the young adult. In Virginia, this assessment must be administered annually to keep receiving services through Fostering Futures. On page 27 of the manual, it highlights that the local DSS employee working with this young adult should aid the participant to arrange affordable, appropriate housing in a supervised independent living setting. This could be in a foster home or with relatives.

In regard to housing, the NYTD collects data on foster youth and former foster youth experiencing homelessness (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019).

**Percent Reporting Experiences with Homelessness**

|                 | Age 17<br>FY 2014 | Age 19<br>FY 2016 | Age 21<br>FY 2018 |
|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Virginia</b> | 17%               | 16%               | 36%               |

Figure 8. NYTD data on youth experiencing homelessness in Virginia.

**Percent Reporting Experiences with Homelessness**

|                 | Age 17<br>FY 2014 | Age 19<br>FY 2016 | Age 21<br>FY 2018 |
|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>National</b> | 17%               | 20%               | 29%               |

Figure 9. NYTD data on youth experiencing homelessness nationally.

Virginia’s percentages are very similar to the national averages at age 17 and age 19. However, Virginia’s average is higher at age 21. This could be due to services ending at 21 and foster youth no longer being involved in the Fostering Futures program.

**Virginia Department of Social Services- Education**

The Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program in Virginia can fund services to assist eligible youth in successfully completing a post-secondary educational or vocational training program. ETV can cover up to \$5,000 for expenses such as tuition and fees, room and board, rentals, allowance for books and transportation, and other related expenses. Virginia also has the Tuition Grant Program which provides tuition and fees at any Virginia Community College for youth who graduated high school or completed their GED and who were in foster care previously. Assistance from this program is based on financial need.

Here is the NYTD data on the percent of former foster youth in school- high school, GED program, or postsecondary education.

**Percent Reporting Being Enrolled in and Attending School**

|          | Age 17<br>FY 2014 | Age 19<br>FY 2016 | Age 21<br>FY 2018 |
|----------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Virginia | 96%               | 52%               | 30%               |

Figure 10. NYTD data on youth who report being enrolled in and attending school in Virginia.

**Percent Reporting Being Enrolled in and Attending School**

|          | Age 17<br>FY 2014 | Age 19<br>FY 2016 | Age 21<br>FY 2018 |
|----------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| National | 93%               | 52%               | 28%               |

Figure 11. NYTD data on youth who report being enrolled in and attending school nationally.

Virginia’s percentages are very similar to the national percentages of youth being enrolled in school. This can be attributed to a number of factors. While there are various benefits to continuing education, youth may have a desire or need to be working and receiving a steady income. Although Virginia does offer tuition assistance, some youth may not want to continue their education, or may want to work for a while to discover what they want to study. Also, the maximum of \$5,000 does not adequately cover even half of the expenses of most public Virginia colleges and universities.

**Virginia Department of Social Services- Employment**

As highlighted in the last chapter, the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program in Virginia can fund services to assist eligible youth in successfully completing a post-secondary educational or vocational training program. ETV can cover up to \$5,000 for expenses such as tuition and fees, room and board, rentals, allowance for books and transportation, and other related expenses. Also, the Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) provides services to help Virginians with disabilities, including youth in transition, to become more self-

sufficient. These services help youth in transition move from high school to an adult life, including opportunities for employment.

Here is the NYTD data on former foster youth who report full-time or part-time employment.

**Percent Reporting Being Employed Part- or Full-time**

|                 | Age 17<br>FY 2014 | Age 19<br>FY 2016 | Age 21<br>FY 2018 |
|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Virginia</b> | 17%               | 47%               | 60%               |

Figure 12. NYTD data on youth who report being employed part or full-time in Virginia.

**Percent Reporting Being Employed Part- or Full-time**

|                 | Age 17<br>FY 2014 | Age 19<br>FY 2016 | Age 21<br>FY 2018 |
|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>National</b> | 14%               | 40%               | 57%               |

Figure 13. NYTD data on youth who report being employed part or full-time nationally.

Virginia’s percentages are slightly higher than the national averages reported. This is surprising considering that ETV is the only official state program listed. However, because of Virginia’s emphasis on using their local DSS agencies, localities may have various programs to help these youth. For example, in the Hampton Roads area, their local DSS offices orchestrate a program called Skill Builders. This organization primarily provides housing to former foster youth transitioning out of foster care, however they also hope to teach skills to former foster youth about employment, such as financial management and job etiquette (Skill Builders, 2020). Another example is the Great Expectations program. Great Expectations encourages former foster youth by providing them educational and employment opportunities through Virginia’s

community colleges (Dottore, 2018). 21 community colleges across the state participate in this program.

Below is a graph created by the Annie E. Casey Foundation that highlights the services used by Virginia compared to the national averages (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2018).

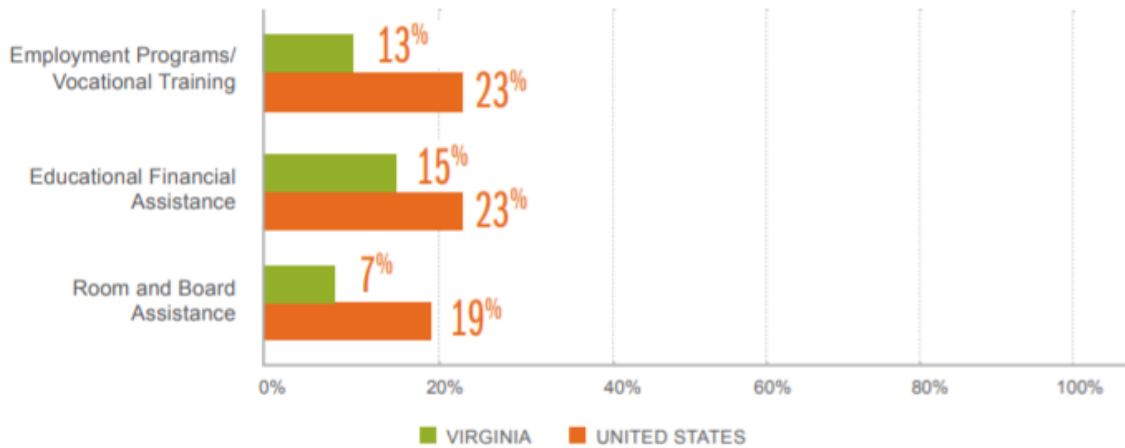


Figure 14. Annie E. Casey Foundation Services Allocation for Virginia.

This graph shows that Virginia spends much less on federally funded transitional services as compared to the national average. It is shocking to see this compared to the NYTD data because Virginia’s averages were very close to the national averages. If Virginia were to be spending more money on these federally funded transitional services for former foster youth, they could be very successful in setting up former foster youth for success and self-sufficiency in adulthood.

In conclusion, Virginia’s averages are very aligned with the national averages in all categories of housing, education, and employment. However, Virginia is spending much less than the national average of spending on transitional services. It is encouraging to see Virginia be so effective with the money they had, however, if Virginia were to spend more money on these

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF STATE POLICIES FOR FORMER FOSTER YOUTH

services, the state could be a leader in the nation for helping former foster youth transition into adulthood.

## **New York**

This chapter will be exploring New York's history of policies regarding former foster youth in the areas of housing, education, and employment. Policies will be followed up with data from the National Youth in Transition Database and the Annie E. Casey Foundation to assess the effectiveness of these policies.

The New York State Division for Youth was established in 1945 and is the oldest and most comprehensive youth services agency in the nation (New York State Division of Youth, 1985). The NY Division for Youth is not only involved in the positive development of children, but also delinquency prevention. Services were transferred from the Department of Social Services to the Division of Youth in 1971. The Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) was created by Executive Order in 1998 (Office of Children and Family Services, 2018). This office was created to facilitate the integration of services for the state's children and youth, including former foster youth. Youth in Progress (YIP) is the OCFS foster care youth leadership team that consists of youth in care across New York.

### **New York Office of Children and Family Services- Housing**

Housing for former foster youth in New York is often provided by the New York State Supportive Housing Program (NYSSHP). The State committed to funding 200 units of supportive housing for youth aging out of foster care (NY/NY III, 2020). Their hope is to provide supportive housing as a solution to homelessness. This housing is independent, affordable, and linked to easily accessible support services. Tenants pay no more than a third of their income in rent. Tenants also have access to assistance in achieving independence such as cooking classes. There are two types of housing. Scattered-site housing are rented apartments in



the community that are visited regularly by support staff. Single site apartments are in a building and run by a non-profit organization where services are located off-site. (NY/NY III, 2020)

There are a handful of non-state agencies that provide housing as well, such as Good Shepherd Services, The Lantern Organization, Neighborhood Coalition for Shelter, and The Door. Across the state, nearly 40 different organizations provide housing and services to more than 600 people, including former foster youth, homeless individuals, and other at-risk adults.

In regard to housing, the NYTD collects data on foster youth and former foster youth experiencing homelessness (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019).

**Percent Reporting Experiences with Homelessness**

|                 | Age 17<br>FY 2014 | Age 19<br>FY 2016 | Age 21<br>FY 2018 |
|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>New York</b> | 15%               | 10%               | 23%               |

Figure 15. NYTD data on youth experiencing homelessness in New York.

**Percent Reporting Experiences with Homelessness**

|                 | Age 17<br>FY 2014 | Age 19<br>FY 2016 | Age 21<br>FY 2018 |
|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>National</b> | 17%               | 20%               | 29%               |

Figure 16. NYTD data on youth experiencing homelessness nationally.

New York’s percentages are significantly below the national averages, especially at ages 19 and 21. This could be due to the many organizations working together to provide housing for former foster youth during their transition.

**New York Office of Children and Family Services- Education**

The Education Training Voucher (ETV) program in New York can fund services to eligible youth in successfully completing a post-secondary educational or vocational training program. ETV can cover up to \$5,000 for expenses such as tuition and fees, room and board, rentals, allowance for books and transportation, and other related expenses (Office of Children and Family Services, 2018).

The Foster youth College Success Initiative Program can provide additional support services and funding to help former foster youth meet the costs of college. Eligible students must be in foster care or were in foster care after their 13<sup>th</sup> birthday. This funding can be used with ETV funding if that is desired.

New York’s Youth in Progress page also provides guides for applying to college. These guides assist in going through a college application, picking a college, and steps on how to help pay for this education.

Here is NYTD data on the percent of former foster youth in school- high school, GED program, or postsecondary education (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018).

**Percent Reporting Being Enrolled in and Attending School**

|          | Age 17<br>FY 2014 | Age 19<br>FY 2016 | Age 21<br>FY 2018 |
|----------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| New York | 96%               | 61%               | 37%               |

Figure 17. NYTD data on youth who report being enrolled in and attending school in New York.

**Percent Reporting Being Enrolled in and Attending School**

|                 | Age 17<br>FY 2014 | Age 19<br>FY 2016 | Age 21<br>FY 2018 |
|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>National</b> | 93%               | 52%               | 28%               |

Figure 18. NYTD data on youth who report being enrolled in and attending school nationally.

New York’s averages again are significantly higher than the national averages, especially at ages 19 and 21. ETV funding on top of funding from the Initiative program may be very helpful in allowing students to pursue higher education.

**New York Office of Children and Family Services- Employment**

As highlighted previously, the ETV program in New York can fund services to assist eligible youth in successfully completing a post-secondary educational or vocational training program. ETV can cover up to \$5,000 for expenses such as tuition and fees, room and board, rentals, allowance for books and transportation, and other related expenses.

The New York Youth Jobs Program encourages businesses to hire unemployed and disadvantaged youth. Under New York’s budget in 2018-2019, there will be \$20 million available to businesses hiring youth. This program is not available statewide but is available in 13 different counties. The YIP pages highlight the NYS Career Center and NYS Career Zone to aid former foster youth in finding jobs and careers. The page also helps youth understand and write a cover letter and resume.

Here is the NYTD data on former foster youth who report full-time or part-time employment.

**Percent Reporting Being Employed Part- or Full-time**

|          | Age 17<br>FY 2014 | Age 19<br>FY 2016 | Age 21<br>FY 2018 |
|----------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| New York | 20%               | 42%               | 54%               |

Figure 19. NYTD data on youth who report being employed part or full-time in Virginia.

**Percent Reporting Being Employed Part- or Full-time**

|          | Age 17<br>FY 2014 | Age 19<br>FY 2016 | Age 21<br>FY 2018 |
|----------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| National | 14%               | 40%               | 57%               |

Figure 20. NYTD data on youth who report being employed part or full-time nationally.

New York’s percentages waver above and below the national averages. While the percentages increase overtime, they do not increase at the same rate as the national averages.

Below is a graph created by the Annie E. Casey Foundation that highlights the services used by New York compared to the national averages (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2018).

**Services**

Transition services, such as vocational training and housing assistance, are designed to help young people with foster care experience transition to adulthood. Participation in federally funded transition services provides a window into how well young people are being equipped for employment, education and housing.

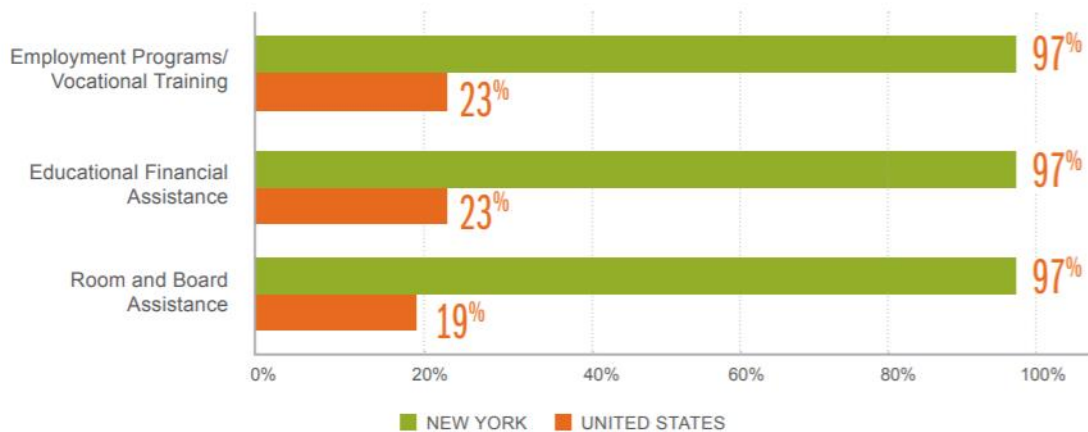


Figure 21. Annie E. Casey Foundation Services Allocation in New York.

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF STATE POLICIES FOR FORMER FOSTER YOUTH

This graph shows that New York goes beyond the national averages for services allocation in employment, education, and housing subsidies. Overall, this spending seems to have been successful for the state. New York shows lower rates of homelessness, more kids in school, and higher employment rates compared to the national averages.

### Analysis

To conclude, the following graphs from the Annie E. Casey Foundation show young adult outcomes in getting employment (part time or full time), receiving a high school diploma or GED, attaining stable housing, and becoming young parents (this was not discussed in this study). The graphs compare each state’s former foster care population (green column) to the U.S. foster care population (yellow column) to the state general population (blue column).

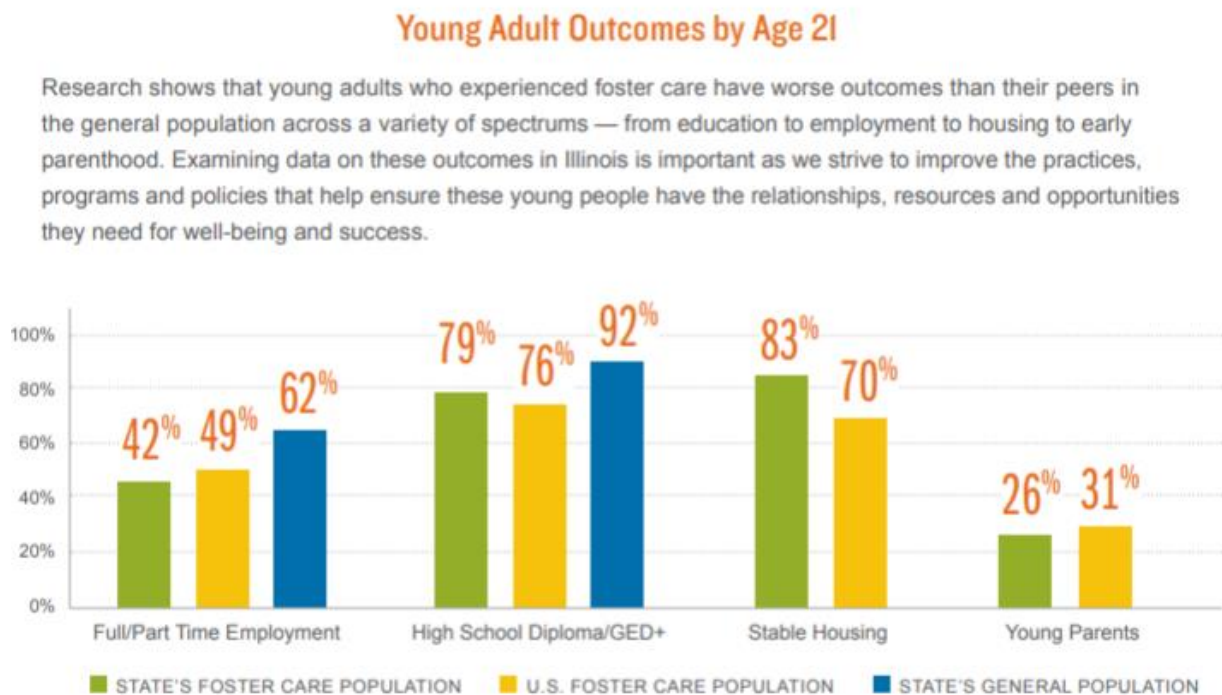


Figure 22. Illinois’ Young Adult Outcomes graph from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

### Young Adult Outcomes by Age 21

Research shows that young adults who experienced foster care have worse outcomes than their peers in the general population across a variety of spectrums — from education to employment to housing to early parenthood. Examining data on these outcomes in Virginia is important as we strive to improve the practices, programs and policies that help ensure these young people have the relationships, resources and opportunities they need for well-being and success.

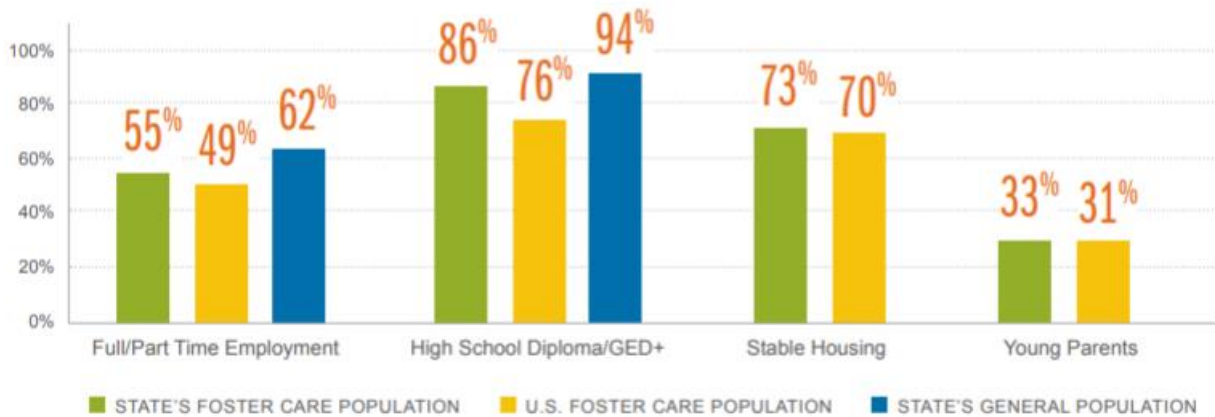


Figure 23. Virginia’s Young Adult Outcomes graph from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

### Young Adult Outcomes by Age 21

Research shows that young adults who experienced foster care have worse outcomes than their peers in the general population across a variety of spectrums — from education to employment to housing to early parenthood. Examining data on these outcomes in New York is important as we strive to improve the practices, programs and policies that help ensure these young people have the relationships, resources and opportunities they need for well-being and success.

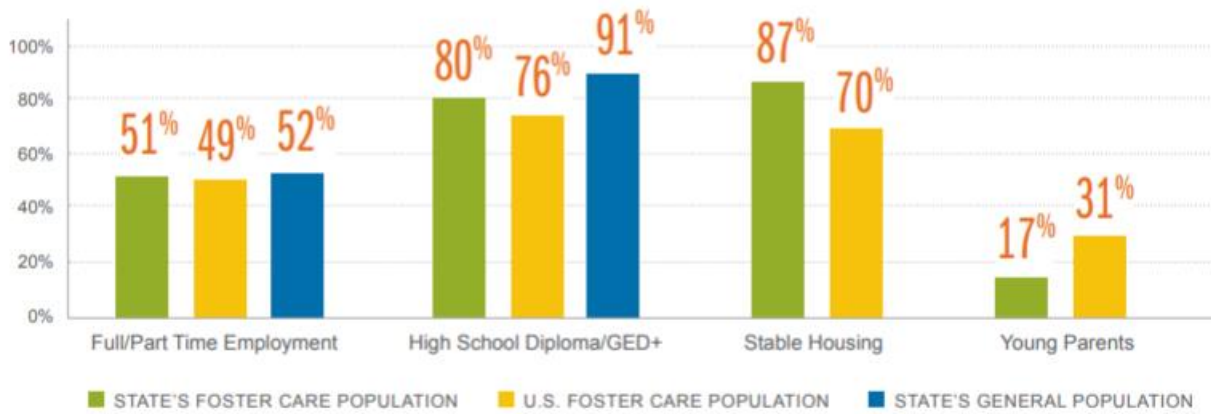


Figure 24. New York’s Young Adult Outcomes graph from Annie E. Casey Foundation.

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF STATE POLICIES FOR FORMER FOSTER YOUTH

To evaluate the effectiveness of these state policies regarding former foster youth and their transition into adulthood, I will also be referring to the six questions posed in the Methodology section.

- Is stable housing made available to former foster youth?
- Is homelessness a threat to many former foster youths in this state as compared to the national average based on NYTD data and Annie E. Casey Foundation data?
- Do education policies in the state allow more students to graduate from high school or receive a GED at a higher rate than the national average based on Annie E. Casey Foundation data?
- Is there state funding made easily available for former foster youth who want to attend college or trade school?
- Do employment policies in the state allow for more former foster youth to be employed than the national average based on NYTD data and Annie E. Casey Foundation data?
- Are there employment programs available that teach former foster youth marketable skills that could lead to long-term success in the workforce?

In the graph below, each question is evaluated by each state and their policies.



COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF STATE POLICIES FOR FORMER FOSTER YOUTH

|                                     | New York | Illinois | Virginia |
|-------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Stable Housing                      | YES      | YES      | YES      |
| Threat of homelessness              | NO       | NO       | YES      |
| High School Completion              | YES      | YES      | YES      |
| College or Trade School Opportunity | YES      | NO       | YES      |
| Employment                          | YES      | NO       | YES      |
| Employment Programs                 | YES      | YES      | YES      |

Figure 25. Graph of Methodology questions.

Based on the preceding graphs, these states perform differently in each category. For having stable housing, again all 3 states are above the national average (70%). New York has the highest percentage (87%), then Illinois (83%), and then Virginia (73%). This variable differs from the NYTD data presented in each state’s chapter; this looked at the percentages of former foster youth that have experienced homelessness at ages 17, 19, and 21. Illinois’ rates of homelessness are far below the averages experienced across the nation. In fact, Illinois is the only U.S. state to have less than 10% of former foster youth in experiencing homelessness at age 21 (7%). This can be attributed to their extensive housing manual. This 80-page manual

describes the ins and outs of housing. Illinois also offers services (SPIDER) to help former foster youth find affordable housing in their area.

New York's rates of homelessness are just below the national average. The New York State Supportive Housing Program (NYSSHP) is an excellent state program that provides housing for their youth. There are additionally 40 different programs that provide housing to their former foster youth throughout the state. Virginia's rates of homelessness are below the national average at ages 17 and 19, and then spike to significantly above the national average at age 21. Virginia does not cite any state-wide housing policies for former foster youth; housing is handled on the local level. Virginia is not meeting the national standard for former foster youth at the national level.

For attaining a high school diploma or GED, all 3 states are above the national average based on Annie E. Casey Foundation data (76%). Virginia has the highest percentage (86%), then New York (80%), and then Illinois (79%).

While Annie E. Casey Foundation data looked at the rates of students completing high school or receiving a GED, NYTD data looked at students still in school. This could be high school or college or a trade school. For the purposes of this research, we want to know if the policies and programs in place in the state allow former foster youth to succeed in post-secondary education, meaning college or trade school. NYTD data looks at the percentages of students enrolled in and attending school at ages 17, 19, and 21. According to this data, New York greatly exceeds the national average at each age. New York provides post-secondary educational funding through two funds (ETV and The Foster Youth College Success Initiative Program) and has a guide online for applying for college. Virginia's averages remain right above the national averages, and they also have funds for postsecondary education (ETV and Tuition

Grant Program). Illinois fails to meet the national standards at each age. Illinois only provides one fund (ETV) and a tuition-waiver program.

For full or part time employment, Virginia has the highest percentage of former foster youth employed (55%) and Illinois has the lowest (42%). The national average is 49%. This is surprising considering that in the analysis of employment programs offered, Virginia and New York (51%) only offer one program explicitly for former foster youth other than the Educational and Training Voucher (ETV) while Illinois offers five other programs. New York's program is also unique to the programs offered by Illinois and Virginia. Illinois and Virginia's programs focused on working with youth to help them build marketable skills or gain work experience. New York's program, the New York Youth Jobs Program, incentivizes businesses to hire former foster youth. As previously mentioned, New York has an additional \$20 million dollars available to businesses that employ these youth.

Virginia exceeds the national standard under employment. This is because they are effective with the two programs they have in place, especially their ETV program. Their ETV program is implemented within their Fostering Futures program. Fostering Futures is Virginia's foster care program available to former foster youth (Virginia Department of Social Services, 2020). Former foster youth in Virginia apply to be in Fostering Futures if they want to continue to be provided with financial services and social support from their local DSS office. Virginia exceeds the national standard here because of the focused nature of their programs. New York also exceeds the national standard under employment. This is because of their emphasis on business. New York could continue to see improvement in former foster youth employment rates if they had an employment policy or program that focused on the youth specifically or if they strengthen their ETV. Illinois falls short of the national standard and is marked according on

Figure 25. They could see improvement if they centralized their efforts towards employment and engaged with businesses as seen in New York. All three states provide programs, specifically ETV, to their former foster youth. This program teaches them marketable skills that could set them up for long term success in the workforce.

In determining which state's policies are most effective, Figure 25 is most helpful. Illinois has the least effective state policies out of the three states analyzed. While they succeeded in providing stable housing, limiting the threat of homelessness, encouraging completion of high school, and providing employment programs that teach marketable skills. Illinois fails to provide adequate college or trade school opportunities because of a lack of programs. The state also fails to provide adequate employment programs that allow their former foster youth to be more employed than the national average. Virginia is the second-best state here in terms of effective policies. They succeed in all areas except limiting the threat of homelessness. New York has the most effective state policies for former foster youth. New York succeeds all standards set by this research. New York also uniquely spends the most money on federally funded programs, as mentioned in Figure 21.

These graphs by the Annie E. Casey Foundation are helpful in seeing the effectiveness of state policies affecting former foster youth in transition. It is also beneficial to see how these states measure up to the U.S. foster care population and each state's general population. In attaining employment or attaining high school level education, foster youth in these states are always below their state's general population. This fact shows the importance of effective state policies to allow these young adults to be as successful as their peers that do not have foster care experiences.

Overall, effective state policies for former foster youth are concise and thorough. Implementing policies through programs, for example, Virginia implementing ETV through Fostering Futures and Illinois implementing stable housing through SPIDER, is most effective. Ineffective implementation occurs when there are no supporting programs (Virginia and housing) or when there are too many programs under one umbrella (Illinois and employment). A great example of a focused-approach program would be Virginia's ETV program. They only have one other state employment program for former foster youth, but between the two these youth can find the jobs they need. An example of a thorough program would be Illinois' housing packet. The information necessary for finding housing is all there, in an easy-to-read format. Concise, yet thorough programs bring the most success and most opportunities for former foster youth. Former foster youth are also aided when programs are easily accessible. Today, that means being able to find resources on the internet or on social media.

### **Limitations**

Although there are helpful insights and better understanding of state policies concerning former foster youth, there are many limitations to this study. First, we are only looking at 3 states out of 50. A more comprehensive study would analyze more states. Second, while the policies are important, implementation of these policies is also crucial to the number of former foster youth being helped. It seems that many of these policies are mostly implemented on a local level, so success or failure rates can vary based on each locality. Implementation also depends on the caseworkers that work directly with these youth. Caseworkers knowledge of these resources drastically impacts the success of these policies.

Third, while housing, education, and employment are major factors in the success of former foster youth, there are other key factors at play, such as mentorship, emotional supports,

and relationship with a caseworker and local service provider. Fourth, the relay of information from state legislatures to former foster youth looks different from state to state. New York, for example, had technologically savvy templates and age-appropriate avenues (social media) for sharing information. Fifth, many of these services provided are concentrated in cities within these states. While that benefits many people, it also leaves out plenty of youth that live in more rural areas. A prime example of this is in New York. Many extensive transitional services were offered by New York City, but not the state.

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