



HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL
TEACHING HOSPITAL

June 11, 2019

State Representative Kay Khan, Chair
Joint Committee on Health Care Financing
Massachusetts State House
Room 146
Boston, MA 02133

State Senator Sonia Chang Diaz, Chair
Joint Committee on Health Care Financing
Massachusetts State House
Room 111
Boston, MA 02133

Re: Testimony in support of H124/S35: An Act ensuring continuous healthcare coverage for youth who have aged-out of the department of children and families.

Dear Chairs Khan, Chang-Diaz, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Committee on Children Families and Person with Disabilities,

Thank you for providing the opportunity for Boston Children's Hospital to submit this testimony in support of legislation that will improve access to care for vulnerable young adults across the Commonwealth. As the leading provider of pediatric services to MassHealth members we look forward to continuing to work with your committee and members of the legislature to ensure that all children and young adults, especially those who are most vulnerable, receive the access to the care and services they need to maintain optimal health and reach their full potential.

Boston Children's Hospital plays an integral role in the health care safety net for the Commonwealth's most vulnerable children as a leading provider of pediatric services to MassHealth (Medicaid) members. That is why we stand in support of H124/S35: An Act ensuring continuous healthcare coverage for youth who have aged-out of the department of children and families (DCF). Landmark federal health care reform, known as the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, or the ACA, includes a provision that requires all states to provide Medicaid coverage to former foster children up to age 26, provided they were in foster care at the age of 18. Due to the transient nature of our foster care population, it is imperative that we make continuous healthcare coverage as easy as possible for these young adults. This bill will codify the provision in the ACA that allows youth who have aged out of DCF to receive MassHealth benefits until they turn 26 years of age. Additionally, it will require that these young adults are automatically enrolled in MassHealth annually until no longer eligible.


Boston Children's Hospital recognizes that the needs of children in foster care are often complex and require highly coordinated and integrated physical health and mental health services. Ensuring continuity of care for these youth is crucial. Any disruptions in insurance coverage for this population would likely disrupt their vital access to needed supports. Clinical experience and research tell us that youth in foster care have a higher prevalence of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) which according to the Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention (CDC) lead to increased likelihood of depression and anxiety, unintended pregnancy and pregnancy complications, chronic disease and even early death. This is why this bill's automatic re-enrollment provision is so important and will ensure these young adults do not fall off MassHealth at such a critical point in their life course. The Commonwealth has the opportunity to provide stability during a time of transition from the child welfare system into adulthood, when more than ever these young people will need services and supports to succeed.

Passage of H124/S35: An Act ensuring continuous healthcare coverage for youth who have aged-out of the department of children and families, would ensure equitable health coverage for vulnerable young adults by ensuring continuity of health care coverage and access during the transition into adulthood. Far too often, we hear stories from our specialty and subspecialty providers of pediatric and young adult patients not getting access the preventative medical care, mental health and oral health services that they need, only to be forced into a crisis that requires care to be delivered in our emergency department, inpatient units or in some case our operating rooms or intensive care units. Passage of this commonsense legislation would help to prevent unnecessary emergency room utilization and inpatient hospital stays.

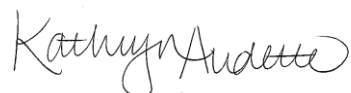
Thank you for your time and consideration of this important bill. We respectfully request that the Joint Committee on Children Families and Person with Disabilities provide H124/S35: An Act ensuring continuous healthcare coverage for youth who have aged-out of the department of children and families with a favorable report at your earliest convenience.

If you have any questions or would like more information, please do not hesitate to contact Kate Audette, Director of State Government Relations at 617.919.3062 or kathryn.audette@childrens.harvard.edu.

Sincerely,



Joshua Greenberg, JD
Vice President for Government Relations
Boston Children's Hospital



Kathryn Audette, MSW
Director of State Government Relations
Boston Children's Hospital