



HEALTH CARE FOR ALL



June 11, 2019

The Honorable Sonia Chang-Díaz
Senate Chair, Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities
Massachusetts State House, Room 111
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Kay Khan
House Chair, Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities
Massachusetts State House, Room 146
Boston, MA 02133

Re: H. 124/S. 35, *An Act ensuring continuous healthcare coverage for youth who have aged-out of the Department of Children and Families*

Dear Chairwoman Chang-Díaz, Chairwoman Khan, and Honorable Members of the Committee,

On behalf of Health Care For All (HCFA) and the Children's Health Access Coalition (CHAC), thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of H. 124/S. 35, *An Act ensuring continuous healthcare coverage for youth who have aged-out of the Department of Children and Families*. HCFA is a statewide consumer health advocacy organization that advocates for health justice in Massachusetts by working to promote health equity and ensure coverage and access for all. CHAC is a coalition of providers, advocates, and other stakeholders committed to ensuring that all Massachusetts children have access to and receive comprehensive health services throughout childhood, from prenatal to adolescent and early adult years.

We are proud that Massachusetts is the national leader in children's health care access, with over 98% of the Commonwealth's young people covered by some form of health insurance. However, maintaining health coverage over time can be challenging for individuals and families, as life circumstances change. This is particularly true for young adults who have been involved in the Department of Children and Families (DCF).

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) includes a provision that requires states to provide Medicaid coverage to former foster children up to age 26, provided they were both enrolled in Medicaid and in foster care at the age of 18. This provision is meant to provide equity with the part of the law that allows children to remain enrolled in their parent(s)' health insurance until they turn 26 years old.

In general, young adults are uninsured at much higher rates than others, but lack of coverage is a particularly acute problem for former foster care youth. They are more likely than their peers to

report having a health condition that limits their daily activities and to be receiving mental health and/or substance abuse counseling. In particular:

- 80% of children coming from the foster care system have a chronic medical condition and are twice as likely to have depression as their peers.
- 25% have three or more chronic health problems.
- Children in foster care use mental health services (inpatient and outpatient) at a rate 15-20 times higher than the general pediatric population.
- Many youth who have aged-out will struggle with poverty, incarceration and unemployment throughout their 20s.

Currently, young adults who age out of foster care remain enrolled in MassHealth for one year and then are mailed a notice to the last known address at the time they aged out. They must reply to this notice by a deadline or lose coverage. This is the first point at which the current system allows these youth to slip through the cracks. If they receive the notice, it informs them that they are required to fill out the full MassHealth application form, even though much of the full application is seeking information about income and these young people are eligible regardless of income. This process can be daunting for former foster youth out on their own to complete. This is the second point that eligible young adults slip through the cracks and lose coverage. We can do better.

Given the extensive challenges and the transient nature of the foster care population, it is imperative that the Commonwealth make continuous health coverage as easy as possible for former foster youth. H. 124/S. 35 simplifies the process for former foster youth to maintain MassHealth coverage by requiring MassHealth to develop procedures to identify and enroll former foster youth who may have lost coverage and automatically re-enroll former foster youth annually until they are no longer eligible.

We urge you to report H.124/S. 35, *An Act ensuring continuous healthcare coverage for youth who have aged-out of the Department of Children and Families* favorably from your committee. Please do not hesitate to contact me at (617) 275-2977 or scurry@hcfama.org with any questions or to discuss this bill further. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Suzanne Curry
Co-Director, Policy & Government Relations, Health Care For All
On behalf of the Children's Health Access Coalition

CHAC Member Organizations

Action for Boston Community Development, Inc.
Alliance for Inclusion and Prevention
American Academy of Pediatrics MA Chapter
Association for Behavioral Healthcare
Boston Children's Hospital
Boston Medical Center
Boston Public Health Commission
Cambridge Health Alliance
Children's Law Center of Massachusetts
Children's League of Massachusetts
Children's Vision Massachusetts
Coalition for Social Justice
Codman Square Health Center
Community Catalyst
Economic Mobility Pathways (EMPath)
East Boston Ecumenical Community Council (EBECC)
Federation for Children with Special Needs
Franciscan Children's
Health Care For All
The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts
Health Law Advocates
Home Care Alliance of Massachusetts
The Home for Little Wanderers
Joint Committee for Children's Health Care in Everett
Massachusetts Advocates for Children
Massachusetts Coalition of School-Based Health Centers
Massachusetts Early Intervention Consortium
Massachusetts Health & Hospital Association
Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy (MIRA) Coalition
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers
Massachusetts Medical Society
Massachusetts Pediatric Home Nursing Care Campaign
Massachusetts School Nurse Organization, Inc.
Medical-Legal Partnership Boston
Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee
Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (MSPCC)
National Association of Social Workers, MA Chapter
New England Alliance for Children's Health
Parent/Professional Advocacy League
Partners HealthCare
United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley