

June 26, 2019

Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz  
Senate Chair  
Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities  
State House Room 111  
Boston, MA 02133

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



**Re: H.124/S.35 An Act Ensuring Continual Healthcare Coverage for Youth Who Have Aged-Out of the Department of Children and Families**

Dear Chairs Chang-Diaz, Khan, and Members of the Committee:

The Home for Little Wanderers respectfully urges you to report favorably on H.124/S.35 An Act Ensuring Continuous Healthcare Coverage for Youth Who Have Aged-Out of the Department of Children and Families, sponsored by forth by Rep. Danielle Gregoire and Sen. Sal DiDomenico. This bill is necessary to support the health care needs of young adults who grew up in the care of the Department of Children and Families and have transitioned out of this system and into independent adult life. These transitional aged youths are exceptionally vulnerable to a host of different risk factors such as unstable housing situations and homelessness, physical and mental health problems, and unemployment. We thank the Senator and Representative for filing this bill as we believe it is a necessary first step to ensuring the Commonwealth's most vulnerable children and youth are appropriately cared for.

The Home has 20 different programs serving vulnerable children and youth across the Commonwealth. Over the past 20 years, we have been focusing particular efforts on providing support for youths to successfully transition out of foster care and into adulthood. We currently have two programs with this focus, our Somerville Village and Roxbury Village group homes. These two programs offer a continuum of services to young adults in the child welfare system, from housing to support with college applications and resume building for job search. We understand that emerging adulthood is an extremely stressful and difficult time for young people, and that having the support of caring adults enables every youth to reach their full potential.

Children who grew up in foster care are a very vulnerable and at-risk population. Most foster youth have a history of trauma, abuse, or neglect, as well as having experienced a number of different

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foster care placements. Children who age-out of DCF care often lack the permanency of a caring, constant, and supportive adult figure to help them navigate the adult world. Because of their exposure to maltreatment, foster youths are at exponentially higher risk of physical and mental health problems, and thus require a comprehensive system of care to ensure they receive the support and services that they need. Unfortunately, the current system of health insurance for youth aging out of DCF care in the Commonwealth is not set up to adequately serve this population.

Research shows transitional aged youth to be extremely transient and prone to homelessness. Too many youth exit DCF placement only to end up couch surfing and entering highly unstable housing situations. The current system does not account for this transience and results in severe barriers to access to care for this population. Under the current system, youth who have aged out of foster care are automatically eligible to receive MassHealth until they turn 26. However, they still need to go through a burdensome application process every year in order to continue receiving coverage. In many cases, the transient nature of this population leads to many never receiving the memo that they have to reapply for continued care, and thus they are unaware that they are becoming uninsured. Without proper health coverage, this population is at great risk for severe adverse health outcomes. This bill would reduce the barriers to continuous coverage for this population by automatically renewing coverage every year until age 26 without having to go through a burdensome and complicated application process. Breaking down this barrier to access to continuous and adequate healthcare coverage is critical for this population and this is exactly what this bill aims to do.

We work with transitional aged youth every day. These are resilient individuals who have been through severe adversity and somehow managed to come out on top. They have faced challenges many of us could only imagine, so the least we could do as a Commonwealth is break down the barriers that prevent them from accessing the comprehensive and continuous network of health and mental health services they so desperately need.

Sincerely,



Brian Condron  
Vice President, External Affairs

Cc: Senator Sal DiDomenico  
Representative Danielle Gregoire