

The Foster Youth Mentoring Act



The Foster Youth Mentoring Act is centered on expanding resources available to mentoring programs and organizations that serve young people in the child welfare system. Mentoring programs that serve youth in foster care provide these resilient youth with the social capital and resources they need to develop positive relationships and valuable social connections. Quality mentoring that includes mentor training, ongoing match support, and screening for potential volunteer mentors provide invaluable support to the agencies and organizations that are working collaboratively to improve outcomes for foster youth.

Summary

The Foster Youth Mentoring Act seeks to address the need for greater support of mentoring programs and organizations that serve youth in foster care. Foster youth often face challenges as they navigate growing up lacking consistent adults. The Foster Youth Mentoring Act seeks to close the relationship gap that young people in the child welfare system face while creating an infrastructure for coordination between child welfare providers, community organizations, family members, and other governmental agencies serving youth. At its core it provides essential funding for competitive grants to mentoring programs and organizations that serve foster youth and prioritize organizations that are committed to quality program design, recruitment, training, screening, and coordination of services.

The bill connects youth in foster care with adult volunteer mentors by providing essential resources to mentoring programs for foster youth. The bill would:

- Authorize funding to provide resources to mentoring programs or organizations that serve foster youth. Programs or organizations would be eligible to receive funds to support the expansion of their services to more youth in foster care and to improve services for current foster youth in their programs.
- Ensure that mentoring programs participating in the grant program are currently engaged or developing quality mentoring standards to require best practices in the screening of volunteers, matching process, recruitment, training, and program design.
- Provide intensive training to adult volunteers who serve as mentors to foster youth to ensure that they are competent in understanding child development, family dynamics, the child welfare system, and other relevant systems that affect foster youth.
- Increase coordination between mentoring programs and other agencies by requiring a demonstration that the grant awardee has a plan to consult and collaborate with the appropriate community organizations, family members, and other service providers while supporting youth.
- Require the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to develop a report to Congress that includes the number of youth served by the grant and measure educational and social outcomes of youth served by the grant.



Key Talking Points

- Youth in foster care face many challenges including disruptions in education, stable and permanent familial connections, and often lack personal relationships with consistent caring adults who provide them emotional, educational, and professional support.
- Programs or organizations who receive funds through this program must demonstrate quality mentoring best practices in serving foster youth.
- Mentoring programs that serve foster youth are unique and require additional considerations, including specialized training and support necessary to provide for consistent mentoring relationships. The Foster Youth Mentoring Act provides the additional training investment needed to support this vulnerable population of young people.
- Programs or organizations awarded funds through this program would work in coordination with the child welfare system, community organizations, and families to ensure that they are implementing a plan for the young person that reflects their needs and a collaborative community approach to services.
- As the percentage of higher-needs youth in a mentoring program increases, so does the average cost-per-youth. For mentoring programs where 90% of the mentees were in foster care the average cost-per-youth was \$2,718.

Congressional Co-Sponsors

In June 2019, Representative Karen Bass (D-CA) and Representative Don Bacon (R-NE) introduced the Foster Youth Mentoring Act (H.R. 3061). It has bipartisan support in the House of Representatives.

As of June 2020, there are 12 co-sponsors of the bill (listed here alphabetically): Rep. Karen Bass (D-CA), Rep. Don Bacon (R-NE), Rep. Andre Carson (D-IN), Rep. Josh Harder (D-CA), Rep. Alcee Hastings (D-FL), Jim Himes (D-CT), Rep. Jim Langevin (D-RI), Rep. Mark Pocan (D-WI), Rep. Bobby Rush (D-IL), Rep. David Schweikert (R-AZ), Rep. Ross Spano (R-FL), Rep. Nydia Velazquez (D-NY) and Rep. Frederica Wilson (D-FL).

MENTOR and its partners are working with interested Senate offices for a potential introduction of the companion bill.

Supporters

MENTOR is joined by partners in supporting The Foster Youth Mentoring Act, including (alphabetically):

- America's Promise Alliance
- Boys Town
- Child Welfare League of America
- MENTOR Nebraska
- Silver Lining Mentoring