



## TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

**HB 849: Human Services- Universal Basic Income for Transition-Age Youth-Establishment**

**POSITION: Support**

**BY: Linda Kohn, President**

**DATE: March 6, 2024**

The League of Women Voters Maryland **believes that people whose earnings are inadequate have the right to an income and/or services sufficient to meet their basic needs for food, shelter, and access to health care. The League therefore supports House Bill 849**, as the guaranteed basic income of \$1,000 per month for the first three years will help ensure the well-being of transition-age youth who leave Maryland's foster care system at age 21.

Many young people easing into independence and adulthood rely on their families for financial help. Families can provide support by enabling them, for example, to live at home while completing their education or job training. This can give them the opportunity to mature and gain life experience while remaining safe.

But young people aging out of foster care rarely have those options. State support abruptly ends on their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. They then are suddenly expected to be self-sufficient, and to be able to pay for housing, food, transportation, and other basic needs on their own. As a recent Washington Post article<sup>1</sup> noted: "It's jarring to imagine what happens to kids who are simply evicted into adulthood."

These young people can struggle greatly during this very difficult transition period. A University of Maryland School of Social Work study "Youth Homelessness Among Foster Care Alumni" states:<sup>2</sup>

They face a disproportionate risk of drug and alcohol abuse, mental health issues, economic instability, criminal justice involvement, becoming young parents, and future homelessness....Youth exiting foster care often had secure housing for the first three months...but the majority soon became unable to manage rent, resulting in 100% who had experienced housing instability, and 99% who had stayed in emergency shelters since exiting foster care within 6 months of leaving care...

In addition to homelessness, youth aging out of foster care "are more likely to experience behavioral, mental, and physical health issues...employment and academic difficulties, early parenthood, incarceration, and other potentially lifelong adversities.... Youth of color are more likely to experience these challenges."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/02/08/foster-care-graduates-ongoing-support/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youthreachmd.com/content/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/YRMD-Foster-Youth-Policy-Paper.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.aecf.org/blog/child-welfare-and-foster-care-statistics>

**Statistics on Maryland foster care youth at age 21 in 2021 indicate that 16% were incarcerated, 28% were young parents, and only 54% were employed full or part-time.<sup>4</sup> Maryland numbers reinforce the fact that this is an equity issue, as 60% of Maryland's foster care population in 2021 was Black, while only 24% of the foster care population in the U.S. that year was Black.<sup>5</sup>**

The guaranteed income provided in HB 849 will help alleviate some of the instability and danger of this period for our transition-age youth. It will help bridge the gap between foster care and self-sufficiency, helping those vulnerable young people better meet their basic needs as they learn to become independent adults. **The League of Women Voters Maryland, representing 1,500+ concerned members throughout Maryland, urges a favorable report on House Bill 849.**

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<sup>4</sup> <https://assets.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-fosteringyouth-stateprofile-MD.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid