

California Assembly Bill 1615 (Ting) &  
The 2022 Reducing Former Foster Youth Homelessness Budget Proposal

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**1. What would AB 1615 and the Reducing Former Foster Youth Homelessness budget proposal achieve?**

Assembly Bill 1615 was introduced by Assemblymember Phil Ting to reduce homelessness among former foster youth in California by expanding the access to and increasing the effectiveness of supportive housing. The bill would:

- Lengthen the participants' duration in Transitional Housing Program-Plus (THP-Plus) from 24 months to 36 months and change the upper age limit of youth eligible for the program to 24 instead of 23.
- Change the upper age limit of the Housing Navigators Program (HNP) to align with federal Housing Choice Voucher programs so that youth can access HNP through age 24 instead of 21, expand the priority population from foster youth to also include former foster youth, and change the name of the program to the Housing Navigation and Maintenance Program.
- Ease the administration of the Housing Navigators Program, authorizing the California Department of Housing and Community Development to administer the program jointly with the Transitional Housing Program.

In addition to providing funding for AB 1615 to extend the length of the THP-Plus program and expand the Housing Navigators Program budget, the Reducing Former Foster Youth Homelessness budget proposal requests funding to increase the state's capacity to serve an additional 473 youth through the Transitional Housing Program. This is the number of former foster youth who were on a waiting list for transitional housing as of June 30, 2021.<sup>i</sup>

**2. How many former foster youth are experiencing homelessness in California?**

One in four foster youth experience homelessness in California after exiting foster care and before turning 23.<sup>ii</sup> California's THP-Plus programs reach a subset of former foster youth who experience homelessness at an even higher rate—40% of youth who entered the program over Fiscal Year 2020-21 had experienced homelessness between exiting foster care and entering THP-Plus.<sup>iii</sup>

**3. How has the pandemic impacted homelessness among former foster youth?**

The pandemic has had a major impact on housing for former foster youth. In a survey conducted in March 2021, more than one in five youth (22%) reported they had experienced homelessness since the pandemic began a year prior. The experience of homelessness has compounding impacts—youth who reported experiencing homelessness were more likely to have dropped out of school and to be unemployed.<sup>iv</sup>

#### **4. Why is it important to prevent homelessness among foster youth?**

Given that former foster youth experience homelessness at higher rates than the general population, it's important to target housing resources to this population. Half of chronically homeless adults experienced homelessness as youth.<sup>v</sup> By preventing homelessness among former foster youth the state is not only protecting individual young people from undue harm but is also investing in the most effective prevention efforts against chronic adult homelessness.

#### **5. How much would this bill and budget investment cost the state?**

The Reducing Former Foster Youth Homelessness budget proposal requests an annual \$34 million from the State General Fund. This includes a \$25.3 million increase to the Transitional Housing Program, increasing the program's budget from \$8 million to \$33.3 million, and an \$8.7 million increase the Housing Navigators Program, bringing the program's budget from \$5 million to \$13.7 million.

#### **6. How was the cost determined?**

- \$25.3 million increase in Transitional Housing Program budget: Of the \$25.3 million investment in the Transitional Housing Program, \$10.3 million would provide counties funding to extend their THP-Plus programs for an additional year, and \$15 million would fund transitional housing for an additional 473 youth, which is the number of youth who were on a waiting list for THP-Plus as of June 30, 2021.<sup>vi</sup>
- \$8.7 million increase in Housing Navigators Program budget: The \$8.7 million investment in the Housing Navigators Program would enable counties to provide supportive services to approximately 870 additional youth, which was the number specialized Housing Choice Vouchers for former foster youth in California as of June 30, 2021.<sup>vii</sup>

#### **7. What are the current purposes and eligible populations of THP-Plus, the Transitional Housing Program, the Housing Navigators Program, and specialized federal Housing Choice Vouchers, and how are the programs administered?**

- Transitional Housing Program-Plus (THP-Plus): THP-Plus provides up to 24 months of affordable housing and supportive services to former foster and probation youth who are age 18 through 23 but have not yet turned 24. THP-Plus was established in 2001, and up until 2011, was a \$34.9 million state-funded program until it was realigned. The program is now administered locally by county child welfare agencies.
- Transitional Housing Program (THP): Youth eligible to be served with THP funding are age 18 through 24 but have not yet turned 25, with priority given to young adults formerly in the foster care and/or probation systems. The \$8 million program is administered by the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) to county child

welfare agencies. THP provides funding to assist young adults with securing and maintaining housing and can be used to fund local THP-Plus programs.

- Housing Navigators Program (HNP): Youth eligible to be served with HNP funding are age 18 through 21 but have not yet turned 22, with priority given to current foster youth. The \$5 million program is administered by HCD to county child welfare agencies. HNP provides funding for housing navigators to help young adults secure and maintain housing.
- Specialized federal Housing Choice vouchers for former foster youth: The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development administers two Housing Choice Voucher programs for former foster youth who are age 18 through 24 but have not yet turned 25 by the time of voucher issuance—the Family Unification Program (FUP) and the Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) program. Both provide up to 36 months of housing assistance via a Housing Choice Voucher administered by a Public Housing Authority, coupled with supportive services provided by the Public Child Welfare Agency.

**8. What is the current statewide capacity of supportive housing for former foster youth in California?**

California has the capacity to provide supportive housing to 2,179 youth between ages 18 and 24 at any given time. This includes 1,309 youth served by THP-Plus in 47 counties and 870 youth served by Family Unification Program (FUP) and Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) vouchers in 35 counties.<sup>viii</sup>

**9. How much additional supportive housing is necessary to meet the need, and how many youth are currently waiting for housing?**

Based on a statewide survey of county child welfare agencies, California requires the capacity to serve at least 1,249 more former foster youth. This includes 473 youth actively waiting for THP-Plus and 290 youth actively waiting for a FUP or FYI voucher, as of June 30, 2021.<sup>ix</sup>

**10. Isn't THP-Plus realigned? Don't counties already have the local flexibility to alter the length and upper age limit of their THP-Plus programs?**

Yes, THP-Plus is a realigned program, however the program model is fixed in statute. Welfare and Institutions Code section 11403.2(a)(1) indicates that a former foster youth may not be more than 24 years of age to participate in THP-Plus and may not access the program for more than 24 months. Current statute provides counties the option of extending the length and upper age limit of THP-Plus for an additional year, *but only to youth who are enrolled in school*. This option was established in 2014 by Senate Bill 1252 (Torres).

**11. Has the existing optional THP-Plus extension for youth enrolled in school been an effective tool?**

Yes, the THP-Plus extension for youth enrolled in school has been an effective tool for youth who are able to access it. To date, 27 counties offer the extension, which allows youth who are

enrolled in school to remain in THP-Plus for up to 36 months instead of 24 months, and until they turn 25 instead of 24. These 27 counties collectively serve 71% of youth in THP-Plus. In a September 2021 survey of THP-Plus providers, at least 7 in 10 providers rated the extension for youth in school as very or extremely effective across several youth outcomes.<sup>x</sup>

## **12. What is the goal of extending THP-Plus to three years?**

The goal of extending THP-Plus to three years is to make it equally accessible to all eligible youth. JBAY conducted an analysis of the optional third year extension for youth enrolled in school based on 2,314 youth who exited THP-Plus between January 1, 2016 and December 31, 2019. The analysis uncovered that the extension served very few youth, and disproportionately served youth with the least risk factors. Of the 2,314 youth included in the analysis, just 340 accessed the extension. Youth who did not access the extension were:

- seven times as likely to be receiving substance abuse services at exit (29% v. 4%);
- six times as likely to exit the program to an emergency shelter, homelessness, or other unstable housing (i.e. street, car, couch-surfing) (6% v. 1%);
- five times as likely to have dropped out of high school (2% v. 10%);
- more than twice as likely to exit the program involuntarily (31% v. 12%); and
- nearly twice as likely to have been incarcerated for an adult offense while in the program (11% v. 6%).<sup>xi</sup>

By extending housing for youth most in-need, THP-Plus can ensure they make a safe, supported transition to young adulthood and prevent adult chronic homelessness.

## **13. Will extending the THP-Plus program decrease turnover in the program and lead to longer waiting lists?**

No, waiting lists will not be increased because the Reducing Former Foster Youth Homelessness budget proposal would appropriate \$10.3 million in funding to cover the cost of extending THP-Plus an additional year. The \$10.3 million would fund a 25% increase in capacity, which is the approximate amount of housing required to ensure there is no decrease in the number of youth who are able to enter the program annually.

## **14. How will providing funding for supportive services for youth with FUP and/or FYI vouchers increase access to vouchers?**

Providing funding for supportive services for youth with FUP and/or FYI vouchers would increase access to vouchers in two ways:

- Equips counties with funding to meet a federal mandate: To administer FUP or FYI vouchers, HUD first requires a formal partnership between the local Public Housing Authority and Public Child Welfare Agency. The housing authority administers the vouchers, which are funded by HUD, and the child welfare agency provides or contracts for the supportive services, which are unfunded. Currently, some counties do not access these vouchers at all, or they access fewer

vouchers than they need simply because they lack designated funding to provide the required and necessary supportive services.

- **Improves housing authorities' voucher utilization rates:** Before a housing authority can request new vouchers, HUD requires that they have an at least 90% utilization rate for their existing FUP or FYI vouchers. A voucher is considered utilized once a youth has entered into a lease for housing. Without adequate resources to offer quality housing navigation services, youth struggle to lease up with a voucher, and the housing search time can last several months or fail to result in actual housing. This hurts a housing authority's voucher utilization rate and subsequently prevents them from being able to request additional vouchers for youth in need.

**15. If HUD were to remove the requirement for county child welfare agencies to provide supportive services to youth with FUP and/or FYI vouchers, is designated funding for services still necessary?**

Yes. First, the housing navigation provided to youth with FUP and FYI vouchers is critical to assisting youth with securing their housing. In an August 2021 survey administered by JBAY, respondents in half (52%) of California's counties reported that there are instances when youth are unable to secure housing with their FUP and/or FYI vouchers.<sup>xii</sup> It was reported that in some counties it takes 6 to 9 months to secure housing with a voucher, due to a challenging and competitive housing market. Several respondents noted that landlords often are resistant to accept tenants who are transition-age former foster youth and/or are renting with a Housing Choice Voucher. In addition to the housing navigation services, county administrators and providers indicate that the ongoing supportive services are critical for the majority of the youth in need of vouchers, as many former foster youth need a supportive housing model versus affordable housing alone.

**16. If the bill and/or budget proposal are successful, when would these changes take effect?**

If AB 1615 is enacted, it would take effect January 1, 2023. The budget proposal would appropriate funding in the 2022-23 state budget, meaning the state agency administering the funding would take action to allocate it during the 2022-23 fiscal year. If there are changes to state law related to this funding included in any 2022 budget trailer bills, those changes would take effect on July 1, 2022.

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<sup>i</sup> John Burton Advocates for Youth. 2020-21 Statewide Analysis of Supportive Housing for Former Foster Youth in California (2021). Page 7.

<sup>ii</sup> Courtney, M. E., Okpych, N. J., Harty, J., Feng, H., Park, S., Powers, J., Nadon, M., Ditto, D. J., & Park, K. (2020). Findings from the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study (CalYOUTH): Conditions of youth at age 23. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. Page 17.

<sup>iii</sup> Retrieved from the THP-Plus Participant Tracking System by running a report for youth who entered the program between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021.

<sup>iv</sup> John Burton Advocates for Youth. Hanging on by a Thread: The Cumulative Impact of the Pandemic on Youth who have been in Foster Care or Homeless (2021). <<https://jbay.org/resources/hanging-on-by-a-thread/>> Page 8.

<sup>v</sup> United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. Ending Youth Homelessness: Using the Preliminary Intervention Model in your Community's Response (2014).

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<sup>vi</sup> John Burton Advocates for Youth. 2020-21 Statewide Analysis of Supportive Housing for Former Foster Youth in California (2021). Page 7.

<sup>vii</sup> Ibid, page 14.

<sup>viii</sup> Ibid, page 4.

<sup>ix</sup> Ibid.

<sup>x</sup> Ibid, page 9.

<sup>xi</sup> Retrieved from the THP-Plus Participant Tracking System by running a report for youth who exited THP-Plus between January 1, 2016 and December 31, 2019.

<sup>xii</sup> John Burton Advocates for Youth. 2020-21 Statewide Analysis of Supportive Housing for Former Foster Youth in California (2021). Page 19.