

BROADCAST 9675

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TO: Local Department of Social Services Directors, Foster Care Supervisors, and workers; CSA Coordinators; CPMT chairs

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SUBJECT: Update regarding Fostering Futures

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The purpose of this broadcast is to provide initial information regarding the implementation of the Fostering Futures program. The budget which the General Assembly submitted to Governor McAuliffe included language authorizing the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) to implement Fostering Futures, Virginia's extension of foster care services and adoption assistance to 21, beginning July 1, 2016. Fostering Futures also allows eligible youth who were adopted after 16 years of age and who turn 18 years of age on or after July 1, 2016 to continue adoption assistance until 21 years of age. As the Governor has previously indicated support for the program, VDSS feels confident that the final version of the budget which will be signed by Governor McAuliffe will also contain this authorization.

Therefore, VDSS is in the process of developing guidance for local department of social services (LDSS) which will be made available in June. Additionally, VDSS plans to offer transmittal training for the Fostering Futures program through webinars beginning in June. The webinar content will later be made available as an e-learning so that the information presented will continue to be available as needed.

In advance of the Fostering Futures program becoming effective on July 1, 2016, VDSS and the Office of Children's Services are sharing the following information about the program.

The Fostering Futures Program will be available to those youth in foster care (or who were in foster care prior to being committed to DJJ) who turn 18 on and after July 1, 2016.

Youth who have turned 18 or will turn 18 prior to July 1, 2016 will not be eligible for participation in the Fostering Futures program. As a result, there will be two programs in effect in Virginia for youth over 18 for the next three years, at which point all youth being served will be in the Fostering Futures program. There are no changes for youth ages 18 to 21 who are currently receiving Independent Living (IL) services and will continue to receive only those IL services.

The following information applies **ONLY** to those youth who turn 18 on or after July 1, 2016, making them eligible for the Fostering Futures program:

1) Foster care placements **are** allowable under this program; however, group home and residential programs **are not** permissible placements under Fostering Futures. Although participants will be eligible for maintenance payments and foster care placements, budget language expressly prohibits placement in group homes and residential programs. The exception for youth who are turning 18 but on track to graduate from high school before turning 19 will remain in effect for group homes and residential placements. However, as soon as the youth graduates or it becomes clear that he or she will not graduate before turning 19, the youth must transition immediately into another type of placement.

2) In order continue to be eligible for maintenance payments through Fostering Futures, participants are required to be:

- A. enrolled in a high school or equivalency program;
- B. enrolled in a college or post-secondary education vocational program;
- C. participating in a program or activity designed to promote or remove barriers to employment;
- D. working at least 80 hours a month; or,
- E. medically incapable of engaging in any of the above activities.

Fostering Futures was designed to provide a safety-net for youth aging out of foster care. These requirements are intended to permit flexibility and to afford every youth the opportunity to continue to qualify. The goal is to support these youth in the critical period between 18 and 21 to make gains in the areas of education and employment, so that they are better able to be self-sufficient when they exit foster care at 21.

3) In order to maximize federal title IV-E funding for the program, all youth (except those in group homes or residential programs who are on track to graduate before turning 19) will need to voluntarily “sign themselves into” foster care. The Voluntary Continuing Services and Support Agreement will then be approved in the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court. The order resulting from this hearing will indicate that the youth has begun a new foster care episode, and a new IV-E determination, based only on the youth’s income, can be made. It is anticipated that a very high percentage of youth entering the Fostering Futures program will be found eligible for IV-E. No further court hearings are required, although the Judge may choose to schedule them. Additionally, there will be no further reviews or redetermination of IV-E required as long as the youth does not exit the program.

4) For those youth who continue to reside in foster homes, the basic and enhanced maintenance payment will continue to be made to the foster parents. Youth may also

choose to reside in an Independent Living (IL) Arrangement. They will have great flexibility around determining the nature of the IL arrangement. There are no restrictions regarding with whom the youth lives (including on his/her own, boyfriend/girlfriend, birth parents, or other relatives). The goal is to reduce barriers to youth participation and to increase opportunities for youth to have learning experiences, without risking the total loss of the safety-net provided by the program.

In an IL Arrangement, the basic maintenance payment (which will replace the current Independent Living stipend for Fostering Futures eligible youth) can be paid directly to the youth, or with the youth's permission, a portion can be paid directly to the landlord. All youth will continue to be eligible for the supplemental clothing allowance and maintenance for the youth's minor child.

5) Once in the Fostering Futures program, youth can exit and re-enter without restriction. The Fostering Futures program is designed to reduce barriers to participation, and to respond to the age appropriate desire of 18 to 21 years olds to have more independence than they might be prepared to manage. Until they turn 21, all youth who turn 18 on or after July 1, 2016 remain eligible to re-enter Fostering Futures.

6) Youth served by Fostering Futures are eligible and "mandated" for maintenance and community-based services under the Children's Services Act (CSA) and current local processes for referral to the Family Assessment and Planning Team for non-title IV-E maintenance and/or services apply.

7) The Fostering Futures Program extension of adoption assistance will be available to eligible youth who were adopted after 16 years of age and who turn 18 on or after July 1, 2016, to continue adoption assistance until turning 21. Adopted youth have to meet the same eligibility criteria as identified for extension of foster care services. This method will be secondary to the extension of adoption assistance for youth due to special needs and will be incorporated into the process for determining conditions that warrant extension of adoption assistance prior to an adopted youth turning 18 years of age beginning July 1, 2016.

This information is intended to provide the LDSS and CSA coordinators with the information required to begin preparing youth who will be turning 18 in the next year for transition into the Fostering Futures program. All youth in foster care (or who were in foster care prior to being committed to DJJ) who turn 18 on and after July 1, 2016 will be transitioned into the Fostering Futures program. The LDSS **shall** offer services and supports to provide the youth with every opportunity to take advantage of the Fostering Futures program in order to increase the likelihood that former foster care youth will become successful, productive and positive contributors to society in adulthood.