

MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 7, 2020

TO: Directors, Local Department of Social Services

FROM: Michelle L. Farr, Executive Director DHS SSA 

SUBJECT: COVID-19 Older Youth Emancipation Extension Transmittal

During these uncertain times, we have received expressions of concerns from youth in care and alumni who are anxious and distressed about their future as they attempt to navigate through the COVID -19 pandemic. Many of our youth want reassurance that they are not alone and will continue to have the support from their case workers, resource providers and supportive adults. Youth leaving the care of the State of Maryland Department of Social Services-those who are “aging out” of the system- to live on their own are among the most vulnerable in our state, and unfortunately, the status of their vulnerability has increased over the past few weeks and will continue to do so during this unprecedented time.

Many of the older youth who are participants of the Semi Independent Living Arrangement (SILA) and Independent Living Programs (ILPs) rely on many different forms of income including, but not limited to, earned income through employment, income through scholarships, stipends, grants, work study, social security, and/or allowances provided through an ILP and SILA stipend. All these youth are more susceptible to experiencing adverse circumstances as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Maryland Department of Human Services/Social Services Administration (DHS/SSA) will permit foster youth between the ages of 18 - 21 to continue in care, living in the same place, April 2020 through June 2020. The purpose of providing additional support during this pandemic period is to ensure youth are being supported and have access to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommended housing, supplies and food while practicing social distancing.

Effective immediately, DHS/SSA is implementing the following:

- Automatic extension of services provided to youth who will turn 21 during the COVID-19 crisis (April 2020 - June 2020). These services would include housing, food, unemployment, and casework assistance targeted at assisting youth access employment, mental health and medical care, and safe, stable and affordable housing;
- Continued support for DHS/SSA housing options for youth who recently aged out of care and for youth who will age out of care during the crisis, including foster homes, transitional living programs, independent living programs, etc. To the extent any licensing provisions would be violated by permitting a youth over the age of 21-year old to remain in the placement, temporary waiver of the licensing prohibitions;
- The State will take full advantage of the federal funding available through the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood. The Chafee Program is intended to support current and former foster youth between the ages of 14 and 21, or up to age 23 as allowed.



In addition, we are recommending the following for our local departments of social services:

Caseworkers and ILCs should encourage youth approaching 18 years old to stay in care who lack a permanency plan for adoption, guardianship or reunification despite a youth's current employment, secondary education or vocational training status.

Youth who are approaching 21 years of age who request additional services may receive guidance and support through the LDSS. Caseworkers and ILCs should conduct an assessment and provide the youth with a service agreement which will outline service expectations and youth requirements.

Allowable services include:

- Case management
 - Trauma informed care coordination of services
- Employment & Apprenticeship
 - Access to job readiness programs
 - Referrals for career and job hiring agreement
- Education
 - Access to technology
 - Access to internet
- Access to remote life skills curriculum
- Access and management to food and household supplies
- Access to housing referrals and housing assistance

Additional research resources:

<https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/coronavirus/california-ponders-moratorium-foster-youth-age-out/41853>

<https://aptnnews.ca/2020/03/26/ontario-government-issues-moratorium-on-youth-aging-out-of-care-during-pandemic/>

cc: Kimberly Irvine, Deputy Secretary for Programs, DHS