

2021 Legislative Agenda

Equitable Education Supports

Before COVID-19, students in foster care were already behind their peers on every academic measure, including grades, attendance, test scores and graduation rates. However, pandemic-related school closures and increased mental health needs have led to learning loss and significant disengagement from school.

While Washington state has strong education programs for youth in foster care, funding and geography prevent every youth from accessing them. We must sustain and deepen these education supports now and as students transition back to the classroom.

OUR ASK

- Preserve critical education funding for youth in foster care, including Graduation Success, Educational Advocacy, Early Childhood Education Assistance Program (ECEAP), and Passport to Careers and fully fund Passport to Careers to serve all eligible students.
- Increase funding for Graduation Success by \$5 million to serve the 600 remaining high-school aged youth in foster care statewide.
- Require school building points of contact in every K-12 public school to coordinate services and resources for students in foster care.

Transition to Independence

Alumni of foster care are more likely than their peers to live in poverty, require public assistance, and experience homelessness and incarceration. During the pandemic, young adults who have experienced foster care were among the first to experience food instability, rental assistance and child care loss. Treehouse has advocated for a moratorium to exiting young adults from Extended Foster Care at the age of 21 to help them to avoid being exited into homelessness. We must meet their basic needs and ensure their transition to independence is successful.

OUR ASK

- Protect funding for Extended Foster Care, implement more effective youth-centered transition planning, and provide resources to youth who age out to prevent homelessness.
- Increase funding for youth in foster care to obtain their driver's license and auto insurance coverage by \$450,000, allowing them to get to school and work safely.

Be a voice for youth in foster care!

Sign up for advocacy action alerts today at treehouseforkids.org/advocate

Transformed, Anti-Racist Systems

Disrupt the foster care to prison pipeline

Youth in foster care experience disciplinary action that excludes them from the classroom 3.5 times the rate of their peers. Punitive and inequitable school discipline is often an entry point to the juvenile legal system, and approximately 40% of youth in juvenile rehabilitation (JR) facilities have been in foster care. Most youth in JR report exposure to one or more traumas and one in five meet all criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder. However, over half do not receive treatment for their behavioral health needs while in the state's care.

OUR ASK

- Require expanded training for school resource officers and data collection related to student arrests.
- Significantly expand behavioral therapy and substance use treatment in juvenile rehabilitation facilities to address youth trauma and improve reentry outcomes.
- Support youth in juvenile rehabilitation facilities to successfully reenter their communities and receive essential aftercare supports.
- Provide education access and supports to youth in and released from juvenile rehabilitation facilities.

Provide financial support to relative caregivers

While approximately 45% of children and youth in out-of-home care live with relatives, only 12% of these homes are licensed. Without licensing, relative caregivers do not have access to the essential financial support and services provided to licensed foster families.

OUR ASK

- Simplify licensing requirements and allow relative caregivers to receive a child-specific license, providing equitable access to monthly foster care stipends.

Support Priorities

Sustain and improve post-high school access to education and housing

We support policies and funding to increase the rate of financial aid form completion, to reduce youth and young adult homelessness through the Anchor Community Initiative and Arlington Drive Project, and to improve equitable access to the College Bound Scholarship program.

Address systemic inequities in the child welfare and education systems

We support policies and funding to remove inequitable barriers to family reunification, to provide legal representation for all youth in foster care, to create an intergovernmental task force to address gaps and barriers for Native American youth in multiple state systems, and to fully implement the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA).

Reduce the digital divide among students and families

We support funding to close the digital opportunity gap for children, youth and young adults experiencing foster care and/or homelessness across Washington state.

Treehouse is a proud member of Project Education Impact, Child Welfare Advocacy Coalition (CWAC), High School Success Coalition, Reimagining Schools, and Youth Development Executives of King County (YDEKC).