

Background: If these youth do not find permanency - i.e., they are not returned to their families or adopted - the state must ensure that they are prepared for adulthood as they exit care. Youth aging out of foster care require the same support and life skills that other youth receive from their parents as they transition to adulthood. Young people in foster care frequently point out that normalcy, which involves age- and developmentally-appropriate activities, experiences, and opportunities that should be part of young people's daily lives within a caring and supportive family context, is a significant obstacle to their autonomy and social functioning.

The Texas Foster Care system, which is charged with providing these supports and life skills, faces a capacity crisis as service providers do not have the resources to serve the highest-needs youth. Each month there are on average 117 children without placement (CWOP) in the custody of the Department of Protective Services (DFPS) who are often older and have acute behavioral health needs.¹

Snapshot: Youth in PMC and Older Youth in Foster Care

- 3,370 youth in Permanent Managing Conservatorship (PMC)* age 13 and older at the end of FY 2022.
- 1,377 children and youth in PMC are in congregate care placements on any given day.
- 73% of youth in CWOP in FY 2023 are age 14 or older.
- 64% of youth in CWOP are in PMC.
- 16 days is the average length of stay in CWOP.²
- 8,352 youth served by Preparation of Adult Living (PAL) in FY 2022.
- 10,644 youth eligible for PAL services in FY 2022.
- 1,087 youth aged out of care without permanency in FY 2022.³

Invest in Foster Care to Ensure Quality and Safe Placements

Youth-serving providers are working with DFPS to determine the most effective ways to serve youth in care, but they are struggling due to the rising costs of providing services to these youth. Over the last two years, service providers and other stakeholders have worked closely with the Health and Human Services Commission to identify the true costs of serving youth and have consequently developed recommendations that promote a fair cost reimbursement schedule for quality care through Foster Care Rate Modernization. Increasing state investments in foster care and support services for youth in care will enable service providers to recruit and retain high-quality staff and increase their capacity to serve youth with the greatest needs.

The \$100 million of increased funding in the House and Senate Budgets will help to build capacity to meet the needs of youth and support them as they heal from their trauma.

TNOYS Recommends investing in the Texas Foster Care System to ensure foster care providers have the resources to hire and retain quality staff and provide safe placements that meet the treatment needs of youth in care.

* Permanent Managing Conservatorship is when child has been permanently removed from their home and conservatorship -decision making- about the child has been given to DFPS.

1. DFPS. DFPS Program Data Card. January 2023. Available here: https://www.dfps.texas.gov/About_DFPS/Data_Book/documents/DFPS_Data_Card.pdf 2. Ibid. 3. DFPS Data Book. Available here: https://www.dfps.texas.gov/About_DFPS/Data_Book/Child_Protective_Services/default.asp

Invest in Youth as they Transition to Adulthood

To provide many of the supports young people aging out of foster care need to thrive, DFPS contracts with organizations to provide Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) classes and transitional living services. These services are in the state budget as “PAL purchased client services.” PAL providers teach youth the basic skills needed for living on their own – cleaning, laundry, finances, nutrition, navigating health care – and connect youth to housing, higher education, and workforce options. The services are funded through a 1:4 federal match for state funding, but at the start of FY2023, PAL providers experienced unexpected cuts of up to 26% in their new contracts. Despite the funding cuts, providers are still expected to provide services to all youth and young adults referred to them. As a result, many providers have had to reduce the supports and learning opportunities they offer, transitioning PAL classes to virtual settings, and reducing hands-on learning activities and activities that promote normalcy. This situation highlights the need for increased funding and support for PAL providers to ensure that young people aging out of foster care receive the support they need to succeed in adulthood.

TNOYS Recommends reversing recent funding cuts to PAL and further increase funding to ensure youth transitioning to adulthood have the critical life skills and supports they need to be successful adults.

Enhance Cross-System Collaboration through Improved Data-Sharing

Recognizing that when a youth is involved in one youth-serving system, they are often involved in more than one, it is imperative that systems work together and share data to promote the best outcomes for youth who are multi-system involved. Data collection on youth involved in multiple youth-serving systems is limited in Texas and across the country, making it challenging to accurately quantify the number of youth involved in multiple systems. However, estimates suggest that 45 to 75% of youth referred to juvenile probation in Texas have current or past involvement in the child welfare system. Juvenile probation providers often face challenges in identifying whether a youth is receiving or recently received services in the child welfare or foster care system.

TNOYS Recommends the development of a statewide interoperable data system for youth services to connect current data systems in real-time, identifying if youth are involved in multiple systems and receiving services while maintaining

If providers cannot identify if a youth is receiving or has recently received services, they run the risk of duplicating costly assessments

and services. While there is often local and statewide coordination and collaboration among systems, identification of multi-system-involved youth is not happening quickly enough to enable effective coordination of services and supports.

Address Staffing Shortages by Investing in All Youth Services

Pay increases for probation staff, included in House and Senate budgets, recognize staffing shortages in county-run juvenile probation departments. Stabilizing probation staffing can help keep more youth closer to home and out of state-secure facilities.

Statewide, the youth services field is experiencing staffing shortages with many service providers unable to pay the necessary wages to recruit and retain high-quality staff. It is critical that the Texas Legislature increase funding and pay across all youth-serving systems and provider types. Since staff in these fields possess the transferable skills of supporting youth with behavioral challenges and past trauma, if the budget that funds one group of service providers is increased but not another, there is a great risk of an exodus of quality, tenured staff to the better-funded providers or systems.

TNOYS Recommends to address workforce shortages with increased funding across all youth-serving systems and provider types, recognizing that providers or systems risk losing high-quality, tenured staff.

4. Texas Children's Commission. Dual Status Task Force Final Report December 2021. Available at <http://texaschildrenscommission.gov/media/84912/dual-status-task-force-final-report.pdf>