

# Foster Youth Seek Child Welfare Reform in 2019 Legislative Session

**Oregon falls short in preparing all foster youth for adulthood, foster youth propose a solution**

A group of current and former foster youth from across Oregon met with lawmakers on January 28 in Salem to lobby for child welfare reform. Their priority is to expand Oregon's Independent Living Program (ILP), which prepares foster youth for their transition into adulthood.

While living independently as an adult is a challenge for any young person, youth experiencing foster care are more likely to lack the long term relationships and resources needed to successfully complete high school, gain employment, and live on their own. According to a data brief released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 71 percent of young people in Oregon aged out of foster care without being reunited or connected to a family in 2016, compared to 51 percent of foster youth nationwide. Many young people transitioning from foster care struggle with instability, are less likely to finish high school, have chal-

lenges accessing and maintaining higher education, and face disproportionate levels of unemployment and homelessness.

Hannah Royal is a former foster youth who utilized ILP services and is advocating for the bill. "ILP helped me get a jump start into my adult life by providing funds for me to pay rent and pay for every day expenses," she said. "I'm advocating for expanding these services so that other current and former foster youth can benefit from them too."

Foster youth identified expanding ILP services as a legislative priority for 2019 due to the challenges of aging out of foster care without permanency or supportive relationships. ILP services help youth in foster care make the transition to self-sufficiency as adults by providing training, classes, stipends for living expenses, and one-on-one support. Youth learn about topics such as budgeting, applying for a job, and looking for their first apartment, while building community with other young people preparing for the transition out of care.

"This program did more than just help provide me with living expenses — I learned important skills that will help me for the rest of my life," continued Royal. "Legislators should pass this bill so that foster youth who want to be teachers, doctors, businessmen or women, or any other profession, can do so without the obstacles of not being able to pay rent, not being able to buy groceries, or not having the skills to successfully live independently standing in their way."

The legislative concept was developed by youth at the Oregon Fos-

ter Youth Connection (OFYC) Policy Conference, where current and former foster youth from across the state worked together to identify pressing issues within the foster care system and develop concrete solutions. Out of the 10 policy recommendations formed by foster youth, several others will be considered during the 2019 legislative session. In addition to ILP expansion, OFYC policy recommendations included in Governor Kate Brown's proposed budget include increasing funding for CASAs, foster parent support and training, a peer-led Healthy Relationships Education Program for foster youth, and housing transition support. OFYC is a program of Children First for Oregon and celebrated 10 years of advocacy, activism, and leadership in 2018.

Foster youth will continue to advocate for expanding ILP services during the 2019 legislative session. If passed, the bill will be OFYC's ninth legislative concept to become law. OFYC youth leaders have successfully passed: assistance obtaining driving privileges (2009), a tuition waiver for foster youth entering community college or state university (2011), a Foster Child Bill of Rights & Foster Child's Ombudsman (2013), access to ongoing extracurricular activities (2015), the ability to open a saving accounts

starting at age 12 (2015), and a Foster Children's Sibling Bill of Rights (2017).

**About Oregon Foster Youth Connection**  
*Oregon Foster Youth Connection (OFYC) is a statewide, youth led advocacy group of current and former foster youth between the ages of 14 and 24. Members shape every aspect of what OFYC is, how it is structured, which policies to focus on, and what activities to participate in. Through peer support and adult mentorship, members have the opportunity to build community with other foster youth and grow as leaders by developing solutions for Oregon's foster care system. Learn more at [www.ofyc.org](http://www.ofyc.org).*

**About Children First for Oregon**  
*Children First for Oregon (CFFO) is a statewide, nonprofit organization whose mission is to empower communities to advocate for kids so all children in Oregon thrive. Since 1991, CFFO has worked across the state to galvanize community support for children and inform decision-makers about the solutions kids need. CFFO convenes and engages communities through four program areas: legislative solutions, foster youth advocacy, child abuse prevention, and research and data. Learn more at [www.cffo.org](http://www.cffo.org).*

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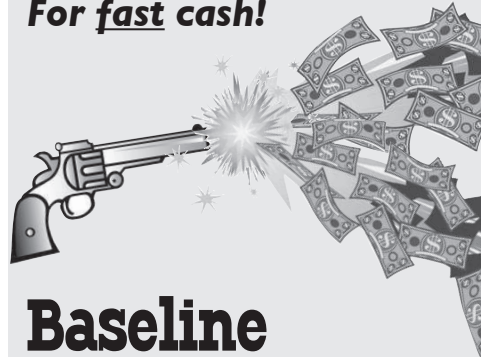
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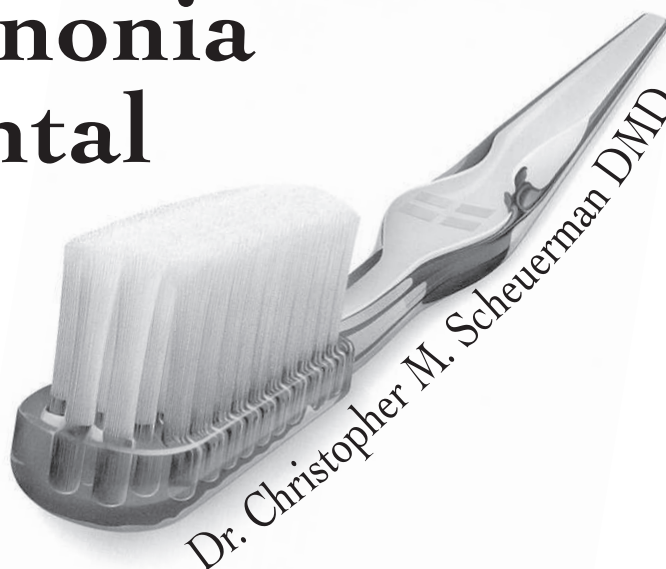
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