



The Foster Youth Mentoring Act of 2023

Background and Issue

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services there are over 400,000 children currently in foster care in the United States. Youth with experience in foster care face many challenges, including disruptions in education and a lack of stable and permanent housing that can make it difficult to maintain strong relationships. Only 50% of youth in foster care complete high school by the time they are 18 years old, and only 20% enroll in higher education upon graduation. Studies prove that mentoring services for foster youth are effective interventions that have a positive impact on a wide range of protective factors including improved mental health, educational functioning and attainment, peer relationships, placement outcomes, and life satisfaction. Additional research demonstrates that mentoring at the time of emancipation from foster care can have a positive impact on transition-related outcomes such as employment, housing stability, and avoiding involvement in the criminal justice system. Mentoring is an evidence-based innovative practice with proven outcomes that can result in a meaningful improvement in people's lives and substantial cost savings for the child welfare system when implemented at scale. In recent years, however, the "mentoring gap" – that one in three young people grows up without a mentor – has grown among young people.

Bill Summary

Mentoring programs that serve children with adverse childhood experiences, such as youth in foster care, require about double the resources per youth than general community-based mentorship programs. The Foster Youth Mentoring Act seeks to address the greater need for critical programs that support our country's most vulnerable young people. The Foster Youth Mentoring Act would provide foster youth with healthy volunteer and peer mentor relationships.

Specifically, the bill would:

- Authorize \$50 million in needed funding for local mentoring programs – including nonprofits, religious organizations and child welfare and educational agencies – that serve foster youth and former foster youth.
- Provide evidence-backed training to volunteers who serve as mentors to foster youth ensuring a strong understanding of child development, family dynamics, the child welfare system, education, and other relevant considerations that affect foster youth.
- Support peer-to-peer mentoring relationships for young people with experience in foster care.
- Ensure that programs receiving a grant follow best practices for screening volunteers and matching mentors with mentees.
- Ensure that the voices of foster youth are included in program development, design, and implementation.
- Improve coordination between mentoring programs and child welfare systems.