

DATE

The Honorable Mike Turner
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Turner,

The undersigned organizations, representing a broad spectrum of housing, children's, and child welfare organizations, share your goal of helping our most vulnerable, including youth aging out of the foster system find stable and safe housing. However, we write to express our opposition to the work requirements and time limits included in the *Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Act of 2017*, as currently written. We have serious concerns that as drafted your bill's strict work requirements would cause many of the youth you are intending to help to lose the support they need and thus place them at increased risk of evictions and, in worst cases, homelessness.

Research shows that for most individuals, work requirements do not lead to stable employment or a path out of poverty and can be counter-productive. This is especially true for youth aging out of the foster care system who frequently enter adulthood with severe disadvantages and face significant barriers to jobs that pay decent wages, including poor educational preparation, few or no financial resources, contact with the justice system, and an absence of family support. According to the National Foster Youth Institute, by the age of 24 – six years after most foster children age out of care – only 50 percent are able to find some kind of stable employment.¹ When these young people do find work, it is often in low-wage jobs that feature unstable hours, no paid sick leave, and high turnover rates – characteristics that are incompatible with work requirements. As a result, these requirements may cause youth to lose the stable housing benefits and related services that make it possible for them to find and maintain employment.

Moreover, individuals with mental health issues—common among young people traumatized as children—or physical health challenges would be at particular risk of being unable to meet the work and education requirements on a consistent basis, month in and month out. While the bill seeks to exempt some youth based on being “unfit for employment,” HUD's current exemption processes do not work well and many individuals fall through the cracks.

We therefore urge you to amend the bill so that housing agencies and project owners are directed to provide these young people access to the Family Self Sufficiency (FSS) Program, which has garnered widespread, bipartisan support. The highly successful and voluntary FSS program offers individuals with career planning advice, job search support, access to training opportunities, and financial incentives to expand earnings, without any of the risks of arbitrary, rigid work requirements.

We applaud your efforts to help provide critical supports to a population whose needs have for too long been forgotten. We stand ready to work with you to ensure youth aging out of foster care have access to safe affordable homes and the supportive services they need to transition to adulthood.

Sincerely,

¹ <https://www.nfyi.org/51-useful-aging-out-of-foster-care-statistics-social-race-media/>