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Children's Advocacy Institute



University of San Diego School of Law
5998 Alcalá Park / San Diego, CA 92110
(619) 260-4806 / (619) 260-4753 (Fax)

800 J Street, Suite 504
Sacramento, CA 95814 / (916) 844-5646

Reply to: San Diego Sacramento
info@caichildlaw.org / www.caichildlaw.org

Executive Director Robert C. Fellmeth
Price Professor of Public Interest Law
USD School of Law

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Contacts: Melanie Delgado / Robert Fellmeth 619-260-4806

NEW REPORT: DESPITE A BUMPY START, LAW ALLOWING FOSTER YOUTH TO REMAIN IN CARE TO 21 HOLDS PROMISE

San Diego, CA: AB 12, the law that allows California's abused and neglected children to remain under the care of counties until the age of 21 instead of 18, had a rocky initial implementation but holds promise in aiding these youth, according to a new report issued by the Children's Advocacy Institute (CAI) of the University of San Diego School of Law. The report, *California's Fostering Connections: Ensuring that the AB 12 Bridge Leads to Success for Transition Age Foster Youth*, performs in-depth reviews of California's implementation of AB 12 by examining how implementation is proceeding in 10 diverse counties around the state.

In 2010, Governor Schwarzenegger signed AB 12 into law. This groundbreaking legislation was enacted to improve the outcomes for youth who age out of California's foster care system. For decades, children in California's foster care aged of the system at 18 with no assistance, no support, and, all-too-often, no home. The outcomes were devastating. Alumni of California's foster care system experienced astronomical rates of homelessness. Rates of unemployment and underemployment far exceeded those of their peers, as did rates of incarceration. Alumni of foster care had far lower rates of high school graduation than their peers, and graduation from college was almost unheard of. AB 12 was enacted with the purpose of improving outcomes for California's foster youth.

AB 12 has provided thousands of foster youth over the age of 18, who otherwise may be homeless and struggling to make it on their own at such a young age, with basic necessities like housing and with opportunities their peers enjoy like the ability to attend college or to start a career.

Unfortunately, CAI's report reveals that obstacles remain for youth who are aging out in California, even foster youth who are now aging out at 21. Studies in other states have found that, while extending foster care to age 21 is effective in improving outcomes at age 21, many youth continue to experience negative outcomes such as homelessness, underemployment, and the inability to complete college, at age 23 and beyond.

"The passage of AB 12 is only the beginning. To ensure that our foster youth can thrive once they exit California's foster care system, California must continue to act to improve AB 12 implementation and to remove obstacles to the success of foster youth," noted CAI Staff Attorney, Melanie Delgado.

In many counties, AB 12 has proven to be far more popular among older foster youth than was originally anticipated. The resulting surge in participation is, in some counties, leading to problems with staffing, and a shortage of appropriate placements. Social workers and dependency attorneys, who already had astronomical caseloads, now have even more clients with a very different set of needs. One of the placement types for foster youth over the age of 18, the THP-Plus Foster Care placements, experienced several delays in regulations and roll out which added to the complications.

The report concludes that while AB 12 is a promising beginning, the median age of self-sufficiency for youth in general is not 21, but 25 years of age. Studies confirm that simply extending room and board or related support to age 21 will only delay the unacceptable outcomes of arrests, poverty and homelessness for several years. It is crucial that these youth be addressed individually, that they participate actively in their own plan for successful emancipation, that they be more than a caseload, and that they be steered in large numbers to vocational training, and wherever possible, to college education. AB 12 needs to be refined to provide those elements and on a somewhat longer track.