



Legislation Text

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INTRODUCTORY*

CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL R
(Resolution)

Introduced by: Councilmember Holton

A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning
The Baltimore City Successful Transitions Task Force

FOR the purpose of creating the Baltimore City Successful Transitions Task Force to identify and facilitate the delivery of services from government agencies, child welfare advocates, service providers, businesses, faith-based organizations, community groups, and other interested parties to ensure the successful transition to independence of children in Baltimore City's foster care system.

Recitals

The National League of Cities' (NLC) introduction to the Municipal Action Guide to Help Cities Support Foster Youth Transitions reports that "each year, more than 20,000 youth across the nation "emancipate" from foster care systems at around 18 years of age. Already having faced the trauma of removal from their birth families and multiple placements, these youth face numerous pitfalls as they transition to independent adulthood."

The NLC found that compared with their peers former foster children run a higher risk of becoming homeless, dropping out of school or college, becoming unemployed, relying on public benefits, and becoming involved in crime as they seek to make it on their own. The NLC compiled the guide to assist city governments because, although they do not administer foster care systems, city governments are increasingly making the transitioning of foster youth a priority, as these young people form a disproportionate number of the at-risk youth that cities seek to reach through education, employment, housing, health, and crime prevention initiatives.

On October 7, 2009, the Fostering Connections Resource Center was launched on the first anniversary of the Fostering Connections Act, the most comprehensive federal reforms to child welfare policy in over a decade requiring safe, permanent families for foster youth and improvement in their overall well-being by addressing health care needs and educational stability. The Fostering Connections Resource Center coalition includes the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Programs, Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, Duke Endowment, Eckerd Family Foundation, Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, Sierra Health Foundation, Stuart Foundation, and Walter S. Johnson Foundation.

At the launching, the executive director of the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative remarked that "The

number of youth who leave foster care by “aging out” has grown every year since 2001, and the percentage of all foster care exits that are “aging out” has nearly doubled in the last decade. This has added to the daunting challenge of implementing this far-reaching federal legislation. Very few American youth have completed high school by 18, the age at which the vast majority of youth are forced to leave foster care, without families or the supports we take for granted for our own children. These young people cannot wait for the economic recovery; we have to begin transforming this system now, and this resource center is another valuable tool for states to accomplish this.

The face of foster care in Baltimore has changed significantly since a lawsuit was brought 25 years ago over how the Maryland Department of Human Resources and the Baltimore City Department of Social Services safeguard the welfare of children in care. Advocates are satisfied that enough progress had been made on changes ordered by a judge in 1988, to end federal oversight of the state and local agencies that oversee the welfare of the City’s more than 5,000 foster children. While the outcome of legal action surrounding the decree is unsure, what is clear is that the number of children in foster care in the City has been reduced by 20%, a record number of adoptions have taken place, new foster parents have been recruited, front line workers’ caseloads have been reduced, staff has been retrained, and a new level of accountability has been instituted across the agency.

As of November 1, 2009, there were 5,011 children in foster care in Baltimore City. Of these, 1,533 are age 17 and older. Since the beginning of the fiscal year, 125 children aged out of foster care, and it is expected that in total 375 children will age out in this year alone. To ensure that youth who age out are “positioned for success in adulthood”, the Baltimore City Department of Social Services is considering adopting age-specific benchmarks to be reached in the core service areas of Education, Employment, Health/Mental Health, Housing, Financial Literacy/Resources, and Family/Friends support, beginning at age 14 and continuing through age 21.

The NLC presents the California Cities Counties Schools (CCS) Partnership’s Transitioning Foster Youth Guide as a template for action. The Guide is based on strategies developed to address the needs of California’s approximately 83,000 children in care, the largest number of any state in the nation. The guide, similar to our own Baltimore City DSS’ plan, addresses 5 areas of critical needs of youths leaving the system. Those areas are housing, employment, education, mental and behavioral health, and permanency. NLC’s Youth, Education, and Families Institute, together with the CCS Partnership and supported by the Walter S. Johnson Foundation, serves as a resource for cities nationwide on developing collaborative approaches to support youth in transition.

To build upon the momentum driven by changes implemented in the foster care system and to ensure that those leaving the security of foster care are best equipped to face life on their own, the Baltimore City Successful Transitions Task Force will access nationwide resources like those offered by NLC and identify local services and programs that can best accomplish the goal of insuring that our foster children make a successful transition to adulthood and are equally equipped with the rest of the world to compete and thrive in the complexities presented by life in the 21st Century.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE, That the Baltimore City Successful Transitions Task Force is created to identify and facilitate the delivery of services from government agencies, child welfare advocates, service providers, businesses, faith-based organizations, community groups, and other interested parties to ensure the successful transition to independence of children in Baltimore City’s foster care system.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Director of the Baltimore City Department of Social Services, or a designee, is requested to act as Chair of the Baltimore City Successful Transitions Task Force.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the membership of the Task Force will include, but not be limited to, representatives from:

- Department of Social Services
- Baltimore City Public School System
- Baltimore Rising, Inc.
- Health Department
- Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice
- Department of Housing and Community Development
- The Family League of Baltimore, Inc.
- Mayor's Office of Employment Development
- Department of Recreation and Parks
- Police Department

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Task Force will submit an organization outline and action plan to the City Council within 60 days of passage of this Resolution.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, the Directors, Executive Directors or CEOs of the Baltimore City Department of Social Services, the Baltimore City Public School System, Baltimore Rising, Inc., the Baltimore City Health Department, the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, the Department of Housing and Community Development, The Family League of Baltimore, Inc., the Mayor's Office of Employment Development, the Department of Recreation and Parks, the Police Department, and the Mayor's Legislative Liaison to the City Council.

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