

Extension of Foster Care Services in Tennessee: An Overview

Recognizing that 18 was too young for most young adults to be without support, a bill was signed into Tennessee law in 2012 giving eligible foster youth the option to continue to receive foster care services and supports until age 21.

What has been known as “Post Custody” Services will be called “Extension of Foster Care Services.”

With a target implementation date of July 1, 2012, eligible young adults may be allowed to continue receiving foster care services after they turn 18. This additional time will help them:

- Prepare for their futures through additional educational and employment training opportunities.
- Find and secure consistent and safe housing.
- Build permanent connections with caring adults, including relatives, mentors and community members.

Some specific benefits that may be available to participating young adults include:

- Educational and Training Vouchers (up to \$5000/year) to help pay for post-secondary education
- Placement support in an approved placement or an Independent Living Allowance (ILA)
- Independent Living Wrap Services
- Access to life skills classes and leadership opportunities
- Support of a child and family team, Family Service Worker and court representatives to help young adults achieve their goals

Receiving extension of foster care services is a choice. Foster youth can decide to leave foster care when they turn 18. They can also change their minds and return before age 21 in order to receive extended services and support provided they meet the requirements.

Young adults who choose to receive Extension of Foster Care Services after 18 need to be doing one of the following to qualify for services:

- Completing high school or an equivalent program
- Enrolled in college, community college or a vocation program
- Young adults who are unable to do one of the above requirements because of a medical condition may also be eligible for services and supports

There are a number of living arrangement options available to young adults who continue in foster care after age 18. These options include:

- Dormitory
- Licensed or approved foster home
- Supervised Independent Living (This housing option can be an apartment with or without a roommate or a room-and-board living arrangement, such as a dorm. Such a placement will need to be approved, and young adults may be able to receive an Independent Living Allowance directly if they choose this living arrangement)
- Young adults may live in the home of a relative or non-related supportive adult. Additional steps will need to be taken in order to qualify for placement support
- Certain group home settings

Young adults who receive extended services and support to help ease the transition to adulthood also have responsibilities. They include:

- Signing an agreement to participate
- Working with the Child and Family Team to create and update a Transition Plan.
- Working with the team to reach Transition Plan goals
- Meeting monthly with the Family Service Worker to track the plan, identify any needed supports, and discuss how to achieve the Transition Plan goals
- Attending a court hearing or administrative review every six months