



# VOICE OF

# THE FOSTER CARE

Children in Foster Care,  
Caregivers and Front-Line  
Child Welfare Workers  
Speak Out

# COMMUNITY



May 2022

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from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation



# Acknowledgments

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This report is dedicated to every child growing up outside of their biological home who deserves a safe, permanent family and the opportunity to thrive.

## About iFoster

iFoster is a national non-profit serving children and youth who are living outside of their biological homes. iFoster's mission is to ensure these children have the resources and opportunities they need to become successful, independent adults and reach their full potential. Annually, iFoster serves over 125,000 children and youth in care and aging out of care providing upwards of \$150 Million resources through its network of partners.

## About C.A.R.E. Consulting Group

C.A.R.E. Consulting Group (CARECG) assists non-profits, corporations and Federal, State, Tribal, County and Local government agencies that want to create a better world. We collaborate with leaders in communities to create custom solutions including training, technical assistance, research and evaluation services.



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# I. Executive Summary

As of September 30, 2020, there were 407,493 children in foster care; 216,838 of these children had entered during the fiscal year. Although substantial administrative and research data highlight the needs of children in foster care, iFoster—a national nonprofit organization in child welfare—sought to better understand and give voice to the lived experience of transitional-age foster youth aged 16–24, caregivers, and child welfare workers. In the first of what will be an annual national survey a total of 2,411 participants completed a survey disseminated via email; 1,049 current and former foster youth, 1,134 caregivers, and 228 workers from 49 states and the District of Columbia.

## SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

**1,049**

current and  
former foster  
care youth

**1,134**

caregivers

**228**

front-line  
workers

**49**

states and  
District of  
Columbia

The overwhelming consensus is that the child welfare system is failing the children and youth it is responsible for raising. It's failing by allowing children to languish in the system longer than they need with no permanency; failing to be equitable; failing to recognize the lifelong impacts of trauma; and failing to prepare youth to be independent when they age out of care if a permanent family has not been found for them. Respondents noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has not caused new issues in foster care, but rather amplified its failures (see Appendix A). The overarching themes noted below are to be taken as interrelated issues deserving of equal consideration and not to be taken as an order of

importance by survey participants. Here are their voices, the words of a vulnerable but resilient group of young people, their caregivers, and front-line workers who provide services in the context of ongoing systemic and financial barriers.

"Each individual youth in foster care is alone. We have to worry about paperwork, we have to worry about food, we have to worry about school expenses, we have to worry about our future. I just want to go to college and get an education. ... I'd like to tell the Biden administration that I and many other foster youth need support. Our families may have abused us, been unable to take care of us, or abandoned us, but we still matter. We want the ability to have hopeful futures, so please support us in our dreams. I want to have to stop worrying about court and paperwork. I want to feel secure, even if I don't have a family. I'm alone, but I still want to be a part of this world, so please take us into account and give us an actual fighting chance."

– Currently in Foster Care Youth, California

## A. The System Fails to Prioritize Child Well-Being.

**FACT:** Children in foster care experience lifelong challenges not only from the trauma of maltreatment but also from their time in the child welfare system.

**FINDINGS:** Mental and physical health problems, food and housing insecurity, education, and substance use are often highlighted. The system is focused on paperwork, policies, and procedures and does not prioritize the well-being of children and youth.

"It is adamant that officials listen to the pleas of current and former foster youth. We are not just numbers on paper, we are human and deserving of being listened to and acknowledged." – **Currently in Foster Care Youth, Texas**

"The trauma and pain of being placed in foster care follows you throughout your entire life. Help and support in all aspects of their young life can help improve their overall health and well-being,"

– **Currently in Foster Care Youth, California**

## B. Structural Inequities Drive Child Welfare Involvement.

**FACT:** Minority and vulnerable communities are overrepresented within the foster care system.

**FINDINGS:** Children of color and LGBTQ+ youth face racism and discrimination, which affects their entrance to and exit from the child welfare system. Poverty intersects with discrimination based on race, ethnicity, and sexual identity, making poor youth of color and sexual or gender minority youth particularly vulnerable to child welfare involvement.

"We see DHS [Oregon Department of Human Services] taking kids away from good parents [who are] struggling and need resources ... not their kids taken. We see kids that should be taken with years of documented abuse that are left in the home due to White status in small rural White communities. DHS ... needs better and more people of color ... [and] needs to work on racism and racist practices." – **Agency Case Worker, Oregon**

## C. Providing a Stable, Permanent Family Needs to be a Priority.

**FACT:** The longer children are in the child welfare system, the worse their short- and long-term outcomes are compared to children not involved in the system.

**FINDINGS:** Greater efforts are needed to support biological parents prior to the removal of children and to help them regain their children as soon as possible. Though once children are removed, caregivers and workers and advocates identify the need to prioritize the well-being of the child

versus the needs of the parents as the source for delayed termination of parental rights permanency.

"Remaining in limbo for so long is so emotionally damaging for these children."

– **Foster Parent Caregiver, Washington**

## D. Resource Scarcity and Inequity is Rampant throughout the System.

**FACT:** The child welfare system is under resourced and underfunded and this has dire consequences for children.

**FINDINGS:** Youth need more equitable access to the resources that do exist and more services as they age out of care without a family, services, like rental assistance, employment, and money for daily expenses, and broad support for achieving individual goals like a high school diploma and a college degree. There is consensus that youth deserve more time to achieve their goals. An important oversight is the unique needs of caregivers, as well as workers and advocates are often dismissed.

"The age to keep receiving help and support needs to be extended because I needed help for a long time, and I wasn't eligible for anything. ... I struggled greatly and barely survived for most of my life."

– **Former Foster Youth, California**

## E. Teaching Youth Self-Sufficiency Must be a Priority.

**FACT:** Youth who age out of foster care are more likely to experience homelessness, as well as significant health disparities.

**FINDINGS:** Overall, transition-age foster youth fear for their futures because they feel ill prepared and under resourced to face emancipation in an evolving world. And caregivers worry they won't have the stamina and financial stability to continue to care. The foster care community would like to see the child welfare system held accountable for, and adequately funded and supported to ensure all transition-age youth are prepared for independence. Youth, caregivers, and workers and advocates called for extending benefits beyond age 24.

“Extend adoption assistance for youth adopted out of foster care to 24. These kids are not prepared for adulthood at 18 and have extensive setbacks over kids in typical families to be prepared. It is not fair to end benefits at 18 and have to fight for this for them.”

– **Adoptive/Pre-Adoptive Parent Caregiver, Minnesota**

“These precious lives are worth every intervention that can be afforded to them.”

– **Foster Parent Caregiver, Iowa**

## F. Those Who Live and Work in the Child Welfare System Should have a say in its Functioning.

**FACT:** Current and former foster care youth are not part of the decisions-making process that impacts their lives.

**FINDINGS:** The community feels strongly they should have input into the decisions and policies that impact their ability to raise foster children. Both current and former foster care youth identified free or low-cost housing (98%), issues of homelessness (96%), and job training and employment opportunities (93%) as the main priorities for the Biden administration. Caregivers identified it was essential to ensure that children and youth get the services they are eligible for. They called for improvements in mental health and substance use treatment supports and increasing foster care and kinship care stipends. Workers and advocates identified issues of eligibility, improved mental health and substance abuse treatment, and increased child maltreatment prevention. In addition to these services, there was overwhelming consensus that Trauma-informed training should be mandatory for all foster parents and professionals working with foster youth.

## Conclusion

The foster care community believes the foster care system does not prioritize the welfare of the children and youth and is not adequately supporting or being held accountable for the success of these young people, particularly those who are left to age out on their own.

The foster care community wants to engage, influence, and improve the child welfare system they live and work in to dramatically improve the outcomes of children who are removed from their homes.<sup>1</sup>

“Please take us into account and give us an actual fighting chance.”

– **Currently in Foster Care Youth, California**

<sup>1</sup> The Voice of the Community survey respondents clearly delineate the differences between the foster care community and the child welfare system. The foster care community is comprised of those living in the confines of the system every day including children and youth and existing out, their caregivers and the front-line workers supporting them. Conversely, legislative guidelines and its funding, the legal entities and administrations in child welfare make up the child welfare system.

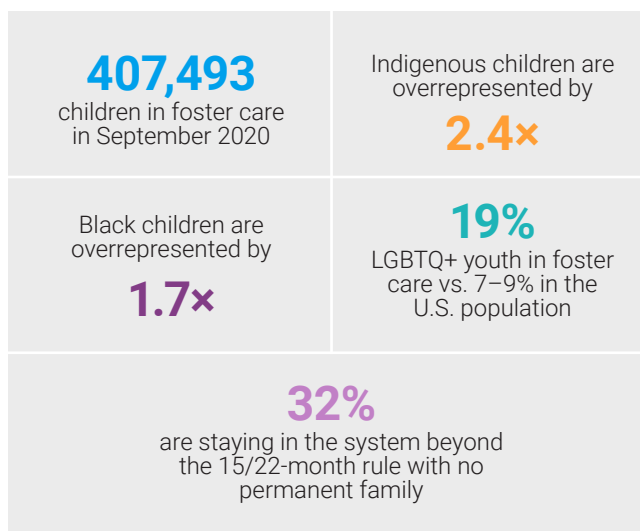


## II. Problem Statement

Children and youth in foster care are a vulnerable population.<sup>2</sup> Although permanency planning—a goal-oriented process aimed at keeping children and youth with their biological family or other permanent families<sup>3</sup>—is the gold standard of care, as of September 30, 2020, there were 407,493 children in foster care; 216,838 of these children had entered during the fiscal year. Overall, national data show negative outcomes for many children involved in the child welfare system, including high rates of mental and physical health problems, homelessness, poverty, and food insecurity. Here, we present key points that will contextualize the research findings presented in this report.

### 1. A disproportionate number of children of color are involved in the system.

In 2020, 20% of children in foster care were African American, 21% were Hispanic, and 46% were non-Hispanic White; smaller percentages of mixed-race (8%), American Indian or Alaska Native (2%), and Asian (1%) children were reported. Annie E. Casey Foundation's annual Kids Count data show that Indigenous children are overrepresented in foster care by 2.4 times and Black children by 1.7 times, whereas White children are underrepresented by 1.14 times. There is also a higher percentage of LGBTQ+ youth in foster care youth: 19% versus 7%–9% of the U.S. population.<sup>4</sup>



### 2. Children are staying in the system beyond the 15/22-month rule with no permanent family.

Thirty-two percent (69,380) of children in foster care have been in care for 24 months or longer. The mean age of children waiting to be adopted is 5 when they entered care, and they spend nearly half their life in care (mean of 31.2 months) and wait 1.5 years from termination of parental rights before they are adopted.<sup>2</sup> More than half of these children (52%) were waiting in nonrelative foster family homes.

<sup>2</sup> In the current report, we use the term "child/children" when we are referring generally to all children involved in the child welfare system. We use the term "youth" when we refer to the participants in the Community Voices sample, as they are transitional age youth between 16–24 years old.

<sup>3</sup> Child Welfare Information Gateway. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration to Children and Families. Retrieved January 25, 2022 from: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/permanency/overview/#~:text=Child%20welfare%20agencies%20use%20a,them%20with%20other%20permanent%20families..>

<sup>4</sup> Willson, B.D.M., Cooper, K., Kastanis, A., & Nezhad, S. (2014). Sexual and gender minority youth in foster care: Assessing disproportionality and disparities in Los Angeles. University of California-Los Angeles School of Law, Williams Institute. Retrieved February 13, 2022, from: <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/sgm-youth-la-foster-care/>

### 3. The longer children remain in the system, the more barriers they often face throughout the lifecycle.

The longer a youth stays in foster care, the more hospitalizations they experience in early adulthood.<sup>5</sup> However, youth who remained in extended foster care experienced a reduced rate of homelessness by 28% between ages 17 and 21; had reduced odds of becoming pregnant (women) between 17 and 21 by 18%; and had decreased criminal justice involvement by 40%.<sup>6</sup>

**80%**

require mental health intervention and services

**50%**

will experience homelessness within 4 years of aging out

### 4. Children and youth who enter the system have complex mental and physical health needs.<sup>7</sup>

Approximately 80% of children and youth with child welfare involvement require mental health intervention and services,<sup>8</sup> and children in foster care are 5 to 8 times more likely to access mental health services and be on psychotropic medications<sup>9</sup> compared to other Medicaid-eligible children.

### 5. Youth transitioning out of the system experience chronic homelessness at alarming rates.

According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness (2015), 25% of youth in foster care will become homeless within 4 years of transitioning out of foster care,<sup>10</sup> and 50% will experience periods of homelessness through housing instability, often couch surfing and living in cars.

5 Fallesen, P. (2013). Time well spent: The duration of foster care and early adult labor market, educational, and health outcomes. *Journal of Adolescence*, 36(6), 1003-1011. DOI: 10.1016/j.adolescence.2013.08.010

6 Courtney, M. E., Okpych, N. J., & Park, S. (2018). Report from CalYOUTH: Findings on the relationship between extended foster care and youth's outcomes at age 21. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

7 Williams-Mbengue, N. (YEAR). The Social and Emotional Well-being of Children in Foster Care. National Conference of State Legislatures. Retrieved January 26, 2022, from: [https://www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/Documents/cyf/Social\\_Emoional\\_WellBeing\\_Newsletter.pdf](https://www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/Documents/cyf/Social_Emoional_WellBeing_Newsletter.pdf)

8 Horwitz, SM, Hurlburt MS, Heneghan A, Zhang J, Rolls Reutz J, Fisher E, Landsverk J, Stein REK (2012). Mental health problems in young children investigated by U.S. child welfare agencies. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*.

9 Leslie LK, Mackie T, Dawson EH, et al. (2010). Multi-state Study on Psychotropic Medication Oversight in Foster Care. Boston: Tufts Clinical and Translational Science Institute.

10 National Alliance to End Homelessness. Retrieved on January 26, 2022, from: <https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/who-experiences-homelessness/youth/#:~:text=50%20percent%20of%20homeless%20youth,of%20longer%20than%20one%20week>.





# III. Research Methodology

## Survey Methodology

Three brief survey tools were developed for current and former foster care youth (four questions), caregivers (four questions), and workers and advocates (six questions; see Appendix B) and disseminated through a single email to each group. The questions were developed by iFoster program staff members, who have more than a decade of collective experience running the organization and working in collaboration with foster care youth, families, and caregivers. Due to the exploratory nature of the research, the iFoster staff included open-ended questions in each survey to learn more about the needs and proposed solutions of stakeholders. These questions simply asked, “Tell us more about what you think we should know.”

## Recruitment and Sample

Current and former foster care youth, caregivers, and workers and advocates were recruited for the study through their sign up and use of the iFoster resource portal. The iFoster portal has approximately 70,000 members, which includes current and former transition-age foster care youth, caregivers (e.g., foster care, kinship care, adoptive, guardian, etc.), and workers (e.g., agency caseworkers, social workers, Court Appointed Special Advocate [CASA] attorneys, etc.).

Survey links were emailed to 33,349 members (this number represents members who registered their email addresses in the system), including 22,485 caregivers, 8,581 youth, and 2,283 workers/advocates, and received 2,411 respondents, for a response rate of 7.2%. The average time participants invested to complete the survey and open-ended question was approximately 90 minutes. Of the 2,411 who completed the survey, 1,049 were current and transition-age foster youth (aged 16–24), 1,134 were caregivers, and 228 were workers/advocates from 49 states and the District of Columbia.

## Data Analysis

Three iFoster employees participated in thematic qualitative coding. Inductive coding was used, because there were no prescribed research questions guiding the coding approach.<sup>11</sup> Each person read the quotes from each participant: current and former foster care youth, caregivers, and workers. Each open-ended response was read and sorted by similarities and differences across groups. Overarching themes were identified and placed in “buckets.” Each coder did this exercise separately and met to resolve conflicts in the coding process. This process took approximately 3 months to complete. Quantitative survey data were collated, and frequencies and percentages were computed. Once a preliminary report was complete, iFoster staff participated in a member checking exercise using focus groups. Former foster care youth that had not participated in the survey were asked open-ended questions about each of the thematic domains that evolved from the data. Feedback about the report was integrated accordingly.

<sup>11</sup> [1] Cresswell, J.W., & Plano Clark, V.L. (2018). *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research* (3rd Edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing, Inc.



# IV. Voice of the Community

In this section, we present the findings from the Voice of Community Survey facilitated through the iFoster portal. We present the findings to questions that probed current and former foster care youth, caregivers, as well as workers and advocates about the child welfare system; their individual and collective needs; and strategies and policies that are needed to better promote child well-being. In addition to presenting the survey findings, we illustrate participants' points using their own words from the open-ended text boxes where they shared their thoughts, feelings, requests, and recommendations.

## A. The System Fails to Prioritize Child Well-Being.

Current and former foster care youth, parents, caregivers, and workers and advocates articulated a need for policies and practices to be trauma informed. Among participants, 97% of former foster youth and 92% of current foster care youth survey participants indicated they need mental health services (see Figure 7b on page 20). Many participants described how the trauma they experienced is lifelong.

"The trauma and pain of being placed in foster care follows you throughout your entire life. Help and support in all aspects of their young life can help improve their overall health and well-being."

– **Former Foster Youth, California**

"I know that a lot of foster youth, like, many of us, have unhealthy coping mechanisms; drug abuse, isolating, spending money, overeating, etc. This impacts us more than the average. I think to prevent a relapse in many youths, which can lead them to be in debt, incarcerated, and/or homeless, there should be proper preventative measures to dealing with mental health and harsh environmental issues at a young age and for older youth, an incentive should be implemented to promote their continuation of rehabilitation, whether long term or short term." – **Former Foster Youth, Nevada**

"Increase training and support for foster families so they know how to help kids who have lots of trauma."

– **Currently in Foster Care Youth, Ohio**

"There needs to be more trauma-informed care from the foster care system. Please hire former foster youth to assist with this." – **Former Foster Youth, California**

Caregivers were also very vocal about the need for ongoing mental health services for children.

"The children need to be able to get therapy and [an] evaluation easily. I was repeatedly told, 'When [he] is 6 years old, we can see him,' and now the wait is even longer. The children have been through so much, and help should be ready."

– **Adoptive/Pre-Adoptive Parent Caregiver, Georgia**

The shortage of mental health and substance use services for children is a continuous challenge for families.

“Mental health is a major issue, and making sure access is easy to navigate for biological families and foster families.” – **Foster Parent Caregiver, North Carolina**

Caregivers openly discussed the stress of working with foster children and youth.

“Counseling services should be mandatory at least once a week. Foster parents and adoption families should be paid more. Kids need tutoring daily. Foster parents need someone to care about their needs also. I always hear those different agencies care about children, and that is good. But who really cares about foster/adoptive parents? We all need help to deal with kids from hard places. The parents need advocates as well. They need to be paid more, and respite care should be paid for and provided for foster children. Respite care should be mandatory.”

– **Adoptive/Pre-Adoptive Parent Caregiver, Oklahoma**

Finally, workers and advocates also mentioned the need for processes to be trauma informed. Youth in foster care are often blamed for their behavior, even when they do not receive the services needed to address their trauma. An agency worker from California stated:

“The current foster care system is not trauma informed. Youth are often blamed for their behavior when they have major mental health concerns from being abused, neglected, and removed from their families, siblings, and other supports. Youth with these higher needs are placed in congregant care facilities that do [not] meet the youths’ needs and more times than not, the youth are retraumatized in these settings. ...These facilities get paid too much for their poor outcomes. ... There are too many conflicts of interest, and these facilities are constantly cutting corners to save money at the expense of children. If you are going to remove a youth from their families due to abuse/neglect, you should not be placing them in facilities where that abuse and neglect is continued and often ignored.” – **Agency Case Worker, California**

## **B. Structural Racism and Discrimination Drive Child Welfare Involvement.**

It is well documented that structural racism and discrimination are drivers of poverty; are often associated with the overrepresentation of children of color in the child welfare system; shape the treatment of children and youth in the system, including their permanency outcomes; and influence their experiences when they transition out of foster care. Many participants described a critical need to reduce the number of children who enter the child welfare system. Respondents discussed the disproportionate number of families from low socioeconomic backgrounds entering the child welfare system. Many youth, caregiver, and worker and advocate narratives illustrated the need for nonpunitive support for families that live in poverty. Poverty should not be conflated with neglect:

“I see many families losing their children purely through circumstances related to poverty. These families and children could benefit from better social programs, instead of removing children from their families for economic reasons and furthering the breakdown of the family unit.” – **Foster Parent Caregiver, South Carolina**

“Invest heavily in community-based preventive resources to stem the tide of children entering care for reasons stemming from poverty rather than on the need for safety.”

– **State, County or Municipality Social Worker, New York**

“A more systemic problem is the removal of children in the first place. One positive step that is being taken is doing more prevention removal through the provision of services. But another step that ought to be taken is reducing poverty and allowing for universal health care/mental health care. Many parents are struggling with poverty and/or substance use and mental health concerns and finding little support in getting out. I truly believe that there would be fewer children in care if their parents were able to have a more consistent, higher income and have the time to seek treatment for their substance use/mental health challenges.”

– **State, County or Municipality Social Worker, New York**

A critical issue that respondents pointed out is the overrepresentation of children of color in the child welfare system.

"We see DHS taking kids away from good parents [who are] struggling and need resources and teaching, not their kids taken. We see kids that should be taken with years of documented abuse that are left in the home due to White status in small rural White communities. DHS in Oregon needs better and more people of color working in and with the foster care system. DHS in Oregon needs to work on racism and racist practices."

– **Agency Case Worker, Oregon**

These sentiments were echoed by workers and advocates across the country.

"Work on addressing disproportionality and disparity in foster care populations, address crossover/dual-status youth and services and supports instead of incarceration for youth."

– **Attorney or CASA, California**

"Children from minority families are not able to be reunified as easy as White children. Minority children continue to be [en]slaved due to the corrupted justice system that locks up their fathers without any leniency."

– **Agency Case Worker, California**

Issues of racism and disproportionality are witnessed by workers and advocates but deeply experienced by children, youth, and caregivers.

"Foster families should go through cultural training for families that are opening homes to children of a different race or culture into their homes. This should include caring for the overall mind and body of the children." – **Foster Parent Caregiver, Arizona**

Protections against racism and discrimination should be extended to LGBTQ+ children and youth who face profound consequences because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

"I live in a program with other people who have mental issues and are homophobic. It is very uncomfortable to share housing with such people and only adds more stress." – **Former Foster Youth, Who Was Targeted because of Their Sexual Orientation, California**

## C. Achieving Permanency (a Permanent Family) Needs to be a Priority.

Survey participants saw the provision of services for biological parents as very important in preventing removal and speeding up reunification.

"Prevention and family support services for families struggling would be so much more helpful than pulling kids out of their families. Additional supports to allow children to live with other family members would be good, too. Stranger foster care should be the last resort for placement."

– **Foster Parent Caregiver, Missouri**

"Now is the time to focus on the trauma that can come from removing children from their biological family. We need to look at better serving biological families to reduce the need of foster care."

– **Foster Parent Caregiver, Alabama**

Caregiver survey participants strongly stated termination of parental rights and adoption is stalled because of the failure to follow federal guidance around timelines for permanency. According to Section 475(5)(E) of the Social Security Act, under which child welfare is funded, action should be taken to terminate parental rights, thus freeing a child for adoption, after a child has been in foster care for 15 of the past 22 months. These rules are in place because outcomes for children are more negative the longer they remain in care.

"Remaining in limbo for so long is so emotionally damaging for these children [particularly regarding termination of parental rights and adoption]. It only allows children some form of stability and closure not living in constant fear of where they are going to end up. It allows for quicker healing and relationship building that is healthy and safe for both bio parent and child!"

– **Foster Parent Caregiver, Washington**

"They need more normalcy and quicker answers on what is going on in the future of their life. Two years minimal is too long for that determination. It creates more issues." – **Foster Parent Caregiver, Florida**

“Once removal has happened due to unavoidable circumstances, the child welfare system needs to promptly deal with the crisis situation, and if parents are unable to work their case plan, then the 15 of 22 months rule needs to be followed so kids don’t languish in care for years. This is a way-too-common occurrence. Parents are given many chances to work their case plan while their children languish in care, being passed back and forth between families and living in instability. Kids deserve permanency and stability. If their parents are unable to provide these things, then a stable resource needs to be found. Just because a parent cannot responsibly raise a child does not mean they cannot have contact with them. A child’s safety is paramount.”

– **Resource Parent, Pennsylvania**

Another concern related to delayed permanency focused on the lack of adoptive homes for older children.

“Foster care providers are in huge need, but adoption of foster children needs to be promoted, supported, and free. Adoption of teens needs promoted.”

– **Former Foster Youth, Washington**

## D. Resource Scarcity and Inequity are Rampant throughout the Child Welfare System.

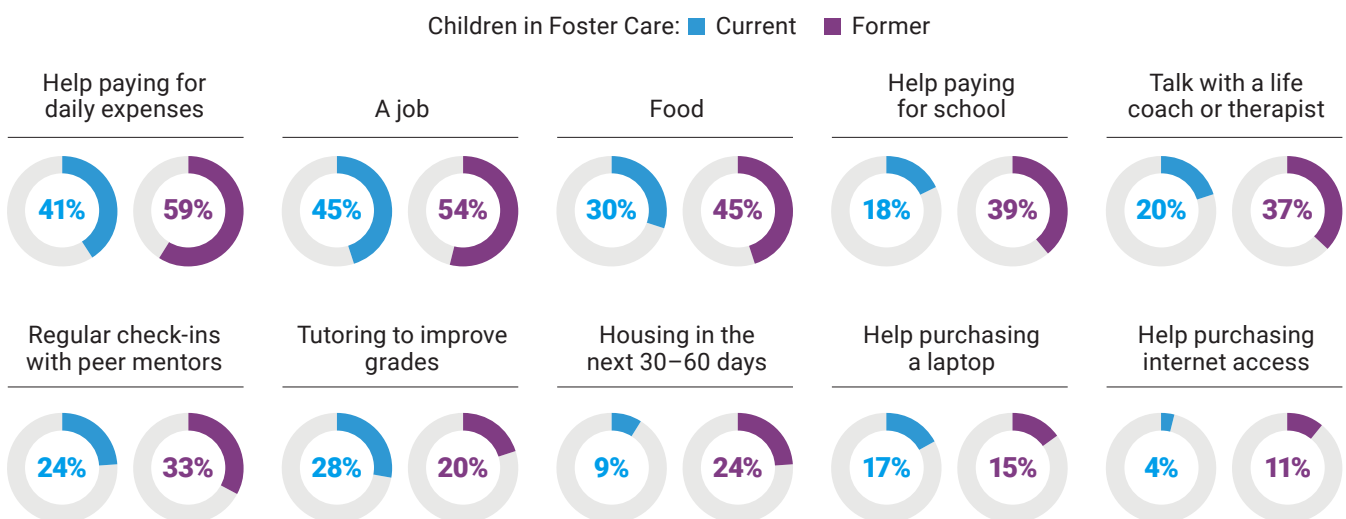
In the first survey question, current and former foster care youth, caregivers, and workers and advocates addressed their financial, emotional, occupational, educational, and employment needs (see Figure 1). Overall, there was a great need for tangible services, like rental assistance, employment, and money for daily expenses, and broad support for achieving individual goals like a high school diploma and a college degree.

Current foster care youth indicated a need for help with employment (45%), daily expenses (41%), and tutoring (28%) to improve their grades, whereas former foster care youth indicated needing the greatest help with daily expenses (59%), employment (54%), and food assistance (45%).

“There are devastating statistics regarding youth who become homeless after foster care, and youth who are unemployed after foster care. This is unfair to the children and the community at large, and it must be dealt with at a government level.”

– **Currently in Foster Care Youth, California**

**FIGURE 1.** Children and youth in foster care identify multiple areas of need.



Q: What do you need help with? Select all that apply.



"It shouldn't have to be a game for youth to have to find the resources and help they need. They shouldn't have to make call after call to figure out what's available, it should be readily given to those who qualify."

— **Former Foster Youth, New York**

Former foster care youth discussed the challenges of receiving services when they are transitioning out of care, and they emphasized the great need for children and youth to be supported until they met their goals.

"I am currently in extended foster care and a third-year [student] at UCLA. The help I receive from foster care is the only thing that is keeping me afloat. I desperately depend on the financial help I receive ... to pay for college and my rent. Since COVID 19, I have had to move back to my mom's house, help take care of the kids, and pay bills that I've never had to before. It has put enormous stress on my shoulders. This year I turn 21, and I am more afraid than ever. I don't know how I'll be able to continue paying bills and pay for college without any help. ... I am afraid of going homeless again because I will no longer have any money."

— **Former Foster Youth, California**

"The age to keep receiving help and support needs to be extended because I needed help for a long time, and I wasn't eligible for anything. ... I struggled greatly and barely survived for most of my life."

— **Former Foster Youth, California**

Some youth highlighted unique challenges that are often omitted from the conversation about foster care youth.

"...Check on us single moms out here every now and then. It gets hard out her[e] and especially when you grew up in the system and don't have a home to go back to, so who do you run to when you need help?"

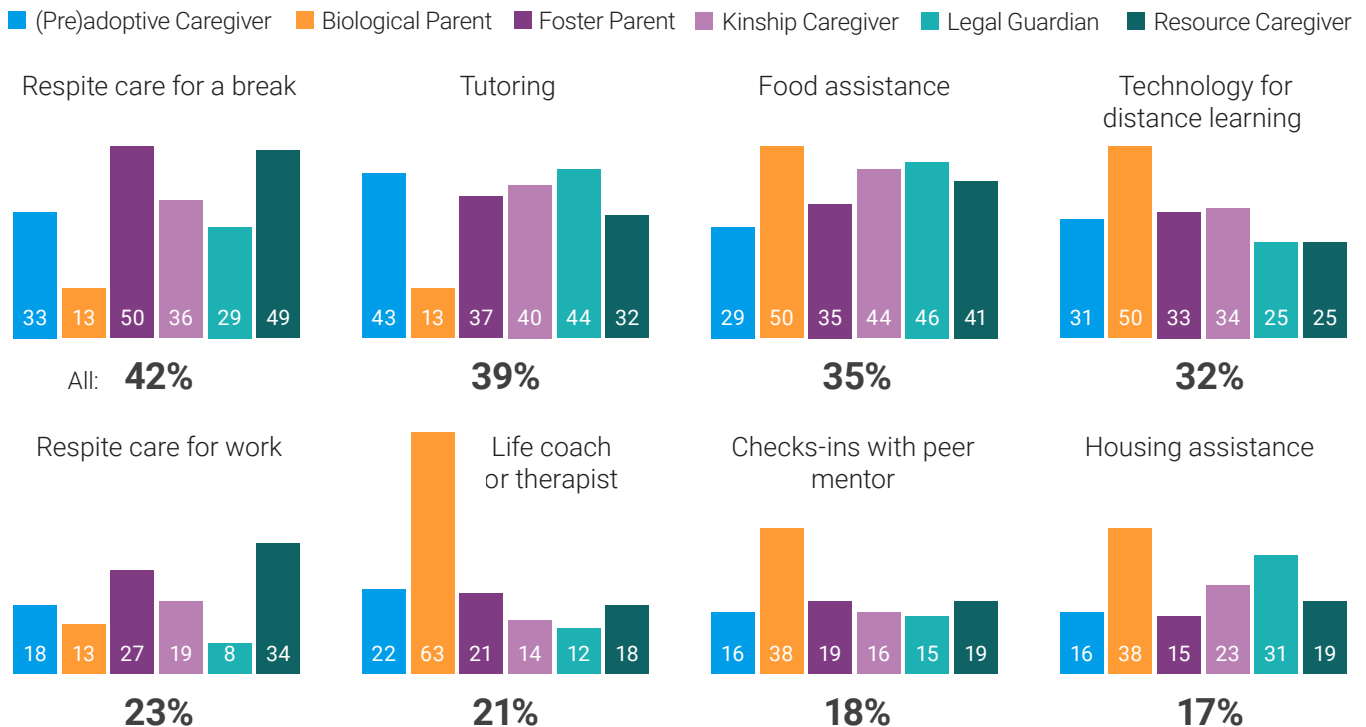
— **Former Foster Youth, Kentucky**

In sum, current and former foster care youth advocated for more attention to their long-term needs.

"Do your best to meet youth needs ASAP and as best as possible. Life is already hard for foster youth, and without being able to get a straight head on the road, it's even more difficult."

— **Former Foster Youth, California**

**FIGURE 2.** Caregivers identify multiple areas of need for current and former foster care youth and families



Q: What could you and your family use help with? Select all that apply.



Caregivers were asked a similar question about the needs of youth and families. iFoster reached out to a diverse group of caregivers, including (pre)adoptive caregivers, biological and foster parents, kinship caregivers, legal guardians, and resource caregivers. The needs of youth and caregivers differed by type (see Figure 2). For example, biological parents indicated their top needs involved a life coach or therapist (63%), food assistance (50%), and technology for distance learning (50%). In contrast, pre-adoptive parents identified tutoring (43%), respite care for a break (33%), technology for distance learning (31%), and food assistance (29%); and kinship caregivers identified food assistance (44%), tutoring (40%), and respite care for a break (36%).

Narratives from caregivers supported the need for more holistic and comprehensive services for youth and families.

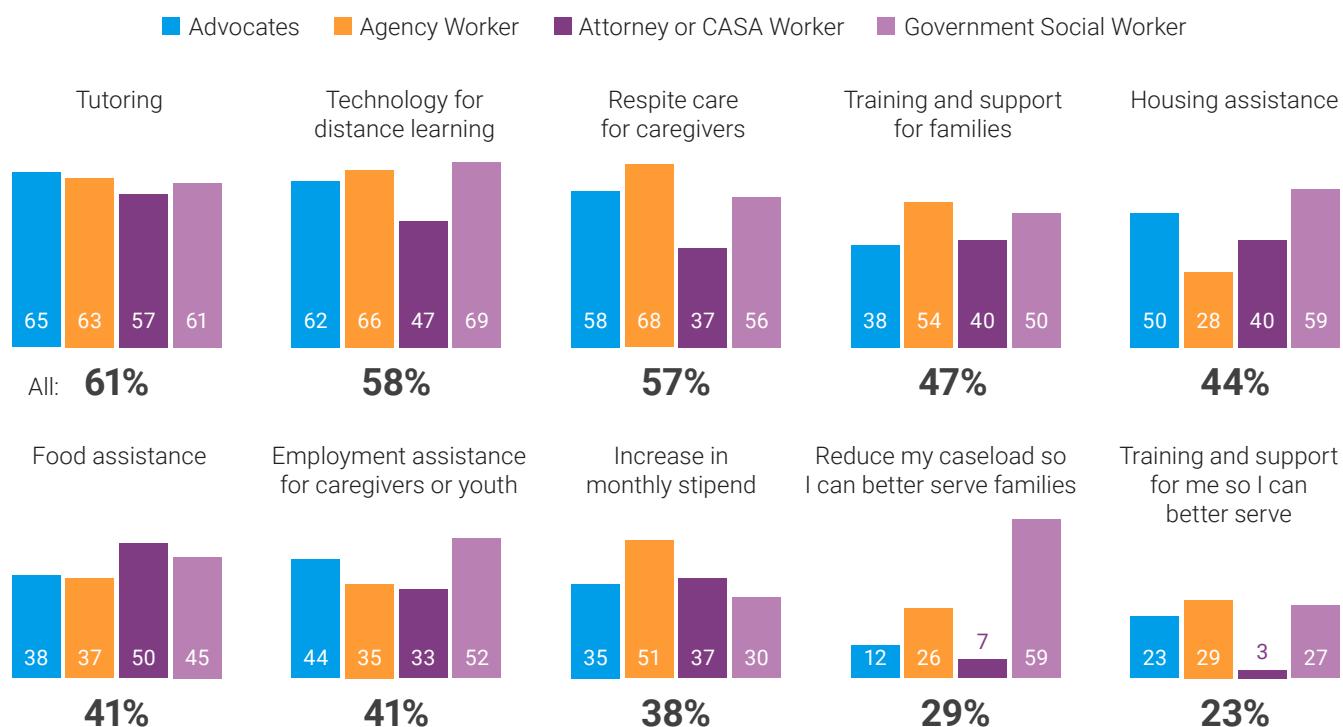
"Childcare is a big problem. Most places do not accept state pay for childcare, and the stipend does not cover childcare. ...Adequate mental health services are also a challenge we have faced. Both situations have nearly cost us jobs." – **Foster Parent Caregiver, Missouri**

"Foster parents need more resources/increased stipends to help take care of children in care. The stipends barely cover necessities much less babysitters so we can take care of our own mental health by taking time away." – **Foster Parent Caregiver, Florida**

"Foster kids are typically behind in school. They need extra resources for tutoring. The schools do not provide the services needed. I have to pay for tutoring out of my own pocket." – **Legal Guardian, Washington**

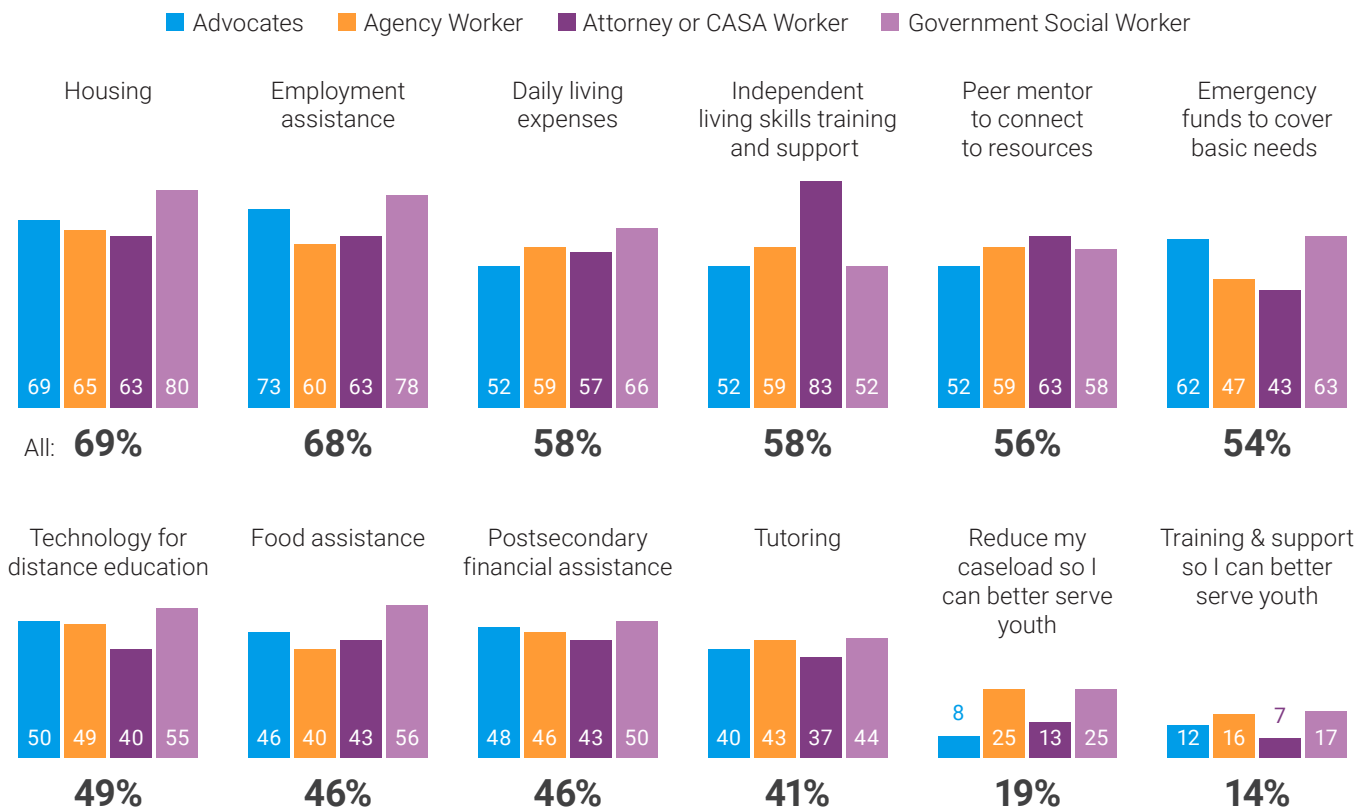
Front-line child welfare workers and advocates provided a congruent assessment of the needs of current (see Figure 3) and former (see Figure 4) foster care youth. This is a diverse group, including advocates, agency case workers, attorneys and CASA workers, and social workers. Among all workers and advocates, tutoring (66%), technology (58%), and respite care for caregivers (57%) were identified as the top three priority needs for children and families in care. For youth aging out of the foster care system (see Figure 4), workers and advocates identified the top areas of need as housing (69%), employment assistance (68%), daily living expenses (58%), and independent living skills training and support (58%).

**FIGURE 3.** Workers and advocates identify significant needs for youth and families involved in the foster care system



Q: What help do your youth-in-care and families need most of all? Select all that apply.

**FIGURE 4.** Workers and advocates identify significant needs for youth aging out of the foster care system



Q: What help do your youth aging out of care, or out of care need most of all? Select all that apply.

Finally, workers and advocates were vocal about the needs of youth via the open-ended questions.

“Missouri ranks the bottom 5 in maintenance payment, \$300/month, which is less than half the cost of raising a child. We are desperate for homes.”

– Agency Worker, Missouri

“Prevention services and activity programs need to be more readily available, especially in rural and low-income areas.”

– State, County or Municipality Social Worker, Virginia

Moreover, workers and advocates addressed how overworked and under resourced they are, acknowledging how this may contribute to unmet needs for youth.

“The compensation for social workers needs to increase significantly in order to assist with retention.”

– State, County or Municipality Social Worker, Virginia

Indeed, the survey findings showed that 59% of social workers (See Figure 3) indicated that they needed to have reduced caseloads so they can better serve families.

## E. Teaching Youth Self-Sufficiency Must be a Priority

Youth, caregivers, and workers and advocates discussed in detail the challenges youth face on the path to self-sufficiency.

“Youth in college should get free housing. It is too much pressure for traumatized children to live in an America that does not provide adequate funding for health care, housing, or living expenses.”

– **Former Foster Youth, California**

Youth admitted that they need training and adequate information in a timely manner so they can take care of themselves:

“Increase training and support for foster families so they know how to help kids who have lots of trauma.”

– **Currently in Foster Care Youth, California**

Many caregivers advocated extending benefits beyond age 24.

“Reparations for youth in care that never reach permanency. This will incentives states to improve their outcomes, and also help young people hold the system accountable. For those receiving reparations, it opens up postsecondary pathways and increases the likelihood that they can afford stable housing ... leading to long-term livability and a path to wealth creation.”

– **Advocate or Other Supportive Adult, Nebraska**

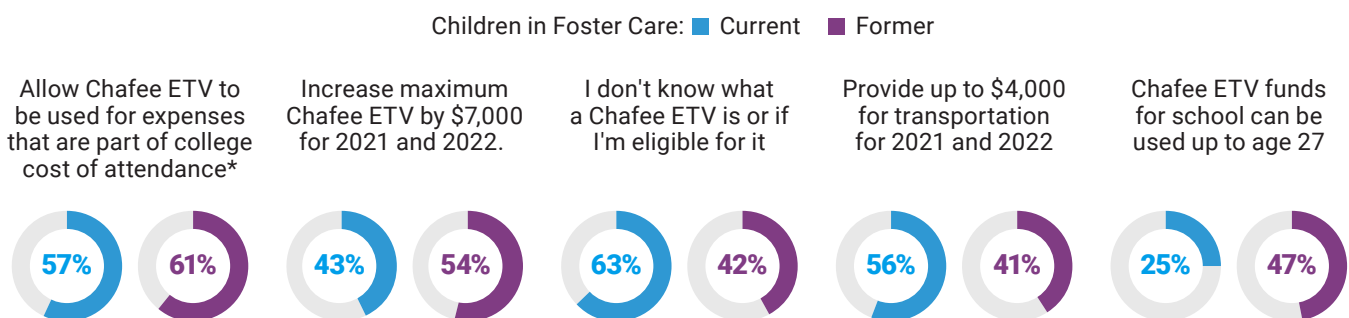
Workers and advocates consistently advocated for similar benefits to those described by foster care youth and caregivers.

“Prepare kids that age out the system that live in expensive states to live on their own. The average rent in California is over \$1,200 and the minimum wage is \$15; do the math.” — **Agency Worker, California**

The iFoster survey probed about increased funding and resources for postsecondary education needs. The Educational and Training Vouchers Program (ETV) for Youths Aging out of Foster Care was added to the Chafee Foster Care for Successful Transition to Adulthood Program in 2002. ETV provides resources to meet the education and training needs of youth aging out of foster care. In addition to the existing authorization of \$140 million for the Chafee program, the law authorizes \$60 million in payments to states and tribes for postsecondary educational and training vouchers for youth as they transition to adulthood after age 18. This program makes available vouchers of up to \$5,000 per year per eligible youth for postsecondary education and training.

In the study sample, a significant percentage of current (63%) and former (42%) foster care youth did not know about Chafee ETV, indicating a need for education (see Figure 5). Among foster care youth who knew about Chafee ETV, 57% of current foster care youth and 61% of former foster care youth indicated that Congress should allow Chafee funds to be expanded for college costs not associated with attendance, such as housing and utilities.

**FIGURE 5:** Foster care youth recommend an increase in funding for postsecondary education needs



\* Off-campus housing, utilities, groceries, clothing, cell phone plan

Q: Congress has approved an increase in Chafee ETV funds for post-secondary education. The Feds suggest that the increase be used more flexibly and go directly to youth in the following ways. Select all that you feel would most benefit you:

"I think the Biden administration should abolish the five-year limit on the Chafee grant. Unfortunately, it takes foster youth longer time to finish BA programs, but [I] also feel like Chafee should be attended to graduate programs, too."

– **Former Foster Youth, California**

Some current and former foster care youth were critical of the requirements, expressing frustration that the Chafee funds are too limited to traditional pathways.

"Chafee grants should be available to all foster youth regardless of what school, career, or academic standing they have. I never received one Chafee grant, and I was in school but stopped going because I needed more help to get to class, wondering where I was going to sleep, and buy school supplies. If it's a grant for foster youth, why can't all foster youth receive it without having to go to school? There are many career options, whether we learn hands on or through a computer, that aren't allowed to have a Chafee grant. I believe everyone should have access to it and not just youth who are in universities or community colleges."

– **Former Foster Youth, California**

Findings among workers and advocates are consistent with those presented by youth; 56% of all respondents agreed that Chafee funds should be expanded for college costs not

associated with attendance, such as housing and utilities (See Figure 6).

"Our focus is helping youth exiting the foster care system have every opportunity to attend and complete college. Fund tuition and costs associated with attending college might not go directly to the school. Youth benefit from being financially supported but also emotionally supported. Contribute to making their lives stable and predictable and without the fear of having it all taken away because they turn 21 or 24 years old."

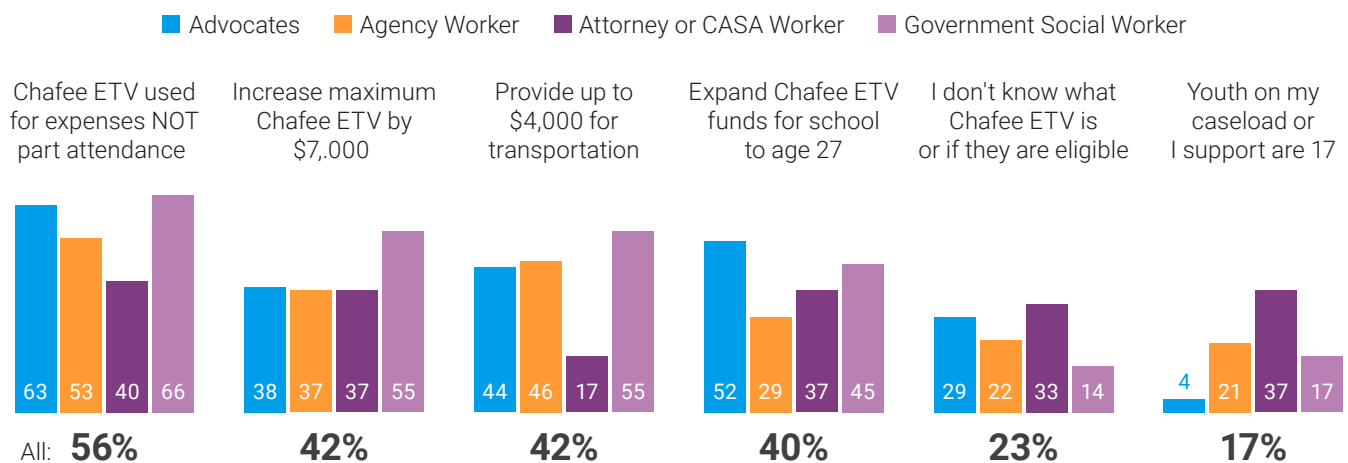
– **Agency Worker, Oregon**

"Remove as many barriers as possible to getting financial assistance into the hands of youth and families. The monthly stipend ... should be increased. ... Provide vouchers for youth to get their textbooks covered each semester. Allow ETV to cover short-term vocational training programs."

– **Agency Worker, New York**

In sum, both foster care youth, as well as workers and advocates acknowledged the strong support needed for youth to obtain their educational and occupational goals. Although Chafee ETV provides some of the needed financial support to achieve their goals, barriers to eligibility and insufficient funding often still present difficulties for former foster care youth who want to attend university, college, or vocational training programs.

**FIGURE 6:** Workers and advocates recommend an increase in funding for postsecondary education needs



Q: Congress has approved an increase in Chafee ETV funds for post-secondary education. The Feds suggest that the increase be used more flexibly and go directly to youth in the following ways. Select all that you feel would most benefit your youth.

## F. Those Who Live and Work in the Child Welfare System Should have a say in its Functioning.

In the survey, former and current foster care youth were asked to tell the Biden administration what the focus of legislation (see Figures 7a and 7b) should be. Both current and former foster care youth identified free or low-cost housing (96%), issues of homelessness (96%), and mental health and substance use services (95%) as the main priorities for the Biden administration.

“Since I’ve exited out of the public social service system, I have endured homelessness for the entirety of my adult life. I have not found one program that could help me at all, and they put me in places where they are not used to having people of my background coming to their neighborhood and then I’m back homeless within a matter of two or three months.”

— Former Foster Care Youth, California

“Youth who have already aged out are completely left to their own as it pertains to ... gaining housing support, financial assistance, medical insurance, health care, and so on. Many of the young adults I advocate for ... are struggling with housing insecurity and lack of financial resource. ... Many still in care are left fearful for what is to come and what their future if any will look like.”

— Former Foster Youth, Rhode Island

Current and former foster care youth indicated that their voices often go unheard.

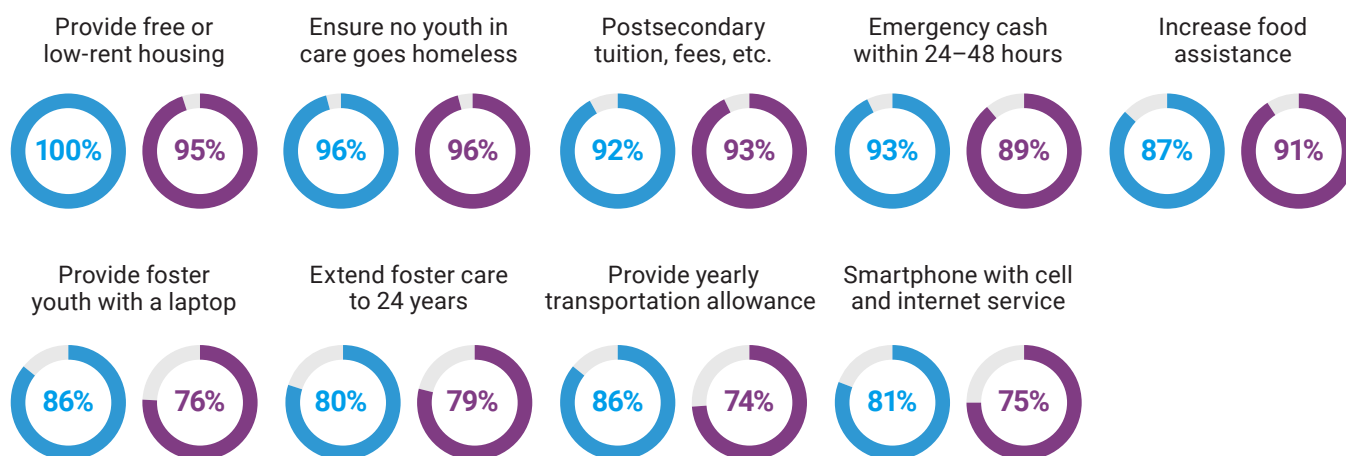
“It is adamant that officials listen to the pleas of current and former foster youth. We are not just numbers on paper, we are human and deserving of being listened to and acknowledged.”

— Former Foster Youth, Texas

**FIGURE 7a:** Current and former foster care youth tell the Biden administration about their needs

### TANGIBLE NEEDS

Children in foster care: ■ Current ■ Former

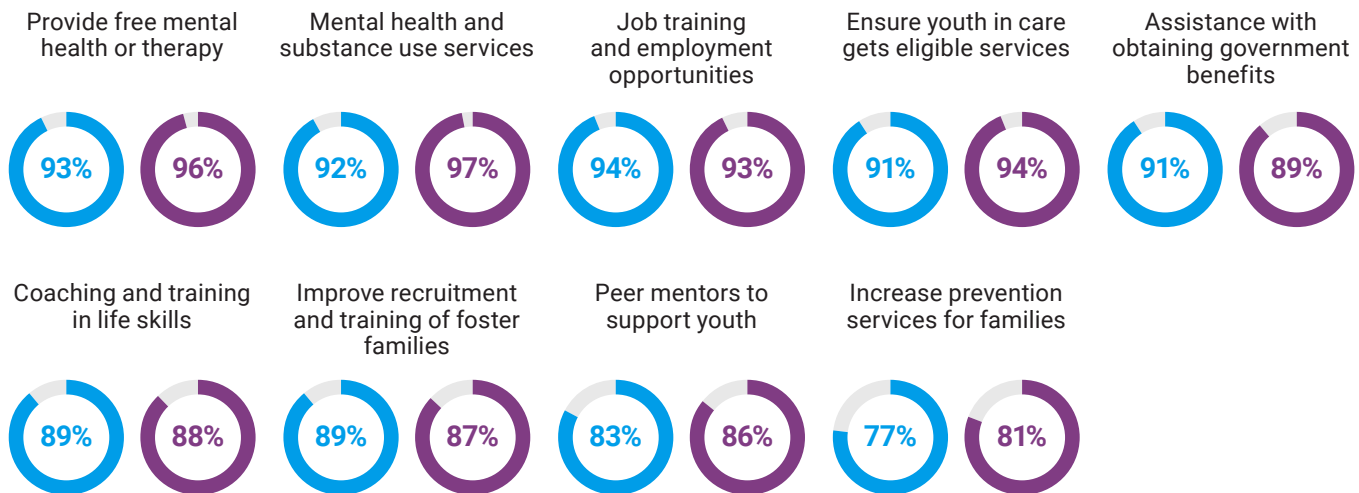


Q: What should the Biden Administration and government work on immediately to improve youth transition out of foster care?

**FIGURE 7b:** Current and former foster care youth tell the Biden administration about their needs

## INTANGIBLE NEEDS

Children in foster care: ■ Current ■ Former



Q: What should the Biden Administration and government work on immediately to improve youth transition out of foster care?

Caregivers indicated that making sure children get the services they are eligible for (85%), improving mental health and substance use treatment supports (79%), and improving child maltreatment prevention services (72%) should be priorities for the Biden administration (See Figure 8). The rankings of importance for identified needs varied by caregiver type (see Figure 8). For example, biological parents indicated staunch support (100%) for child maltreatment prevention services, while 77% of kinship caregivers listed child maltreatment prevention as a priority for the Biden administration.

Related to interactions with social workers, 88% of biological parents advocated for increased training, but only 67% of foster parents and 60% of kinship caregivers advocated for increased training.

“The children need to be able to get therapy and evaluation easily. I was repeatedly told, when [he] is 6 years old, we can see him,’ and now the wait is even longer. The children have been through so much, and help should be ready [available].”

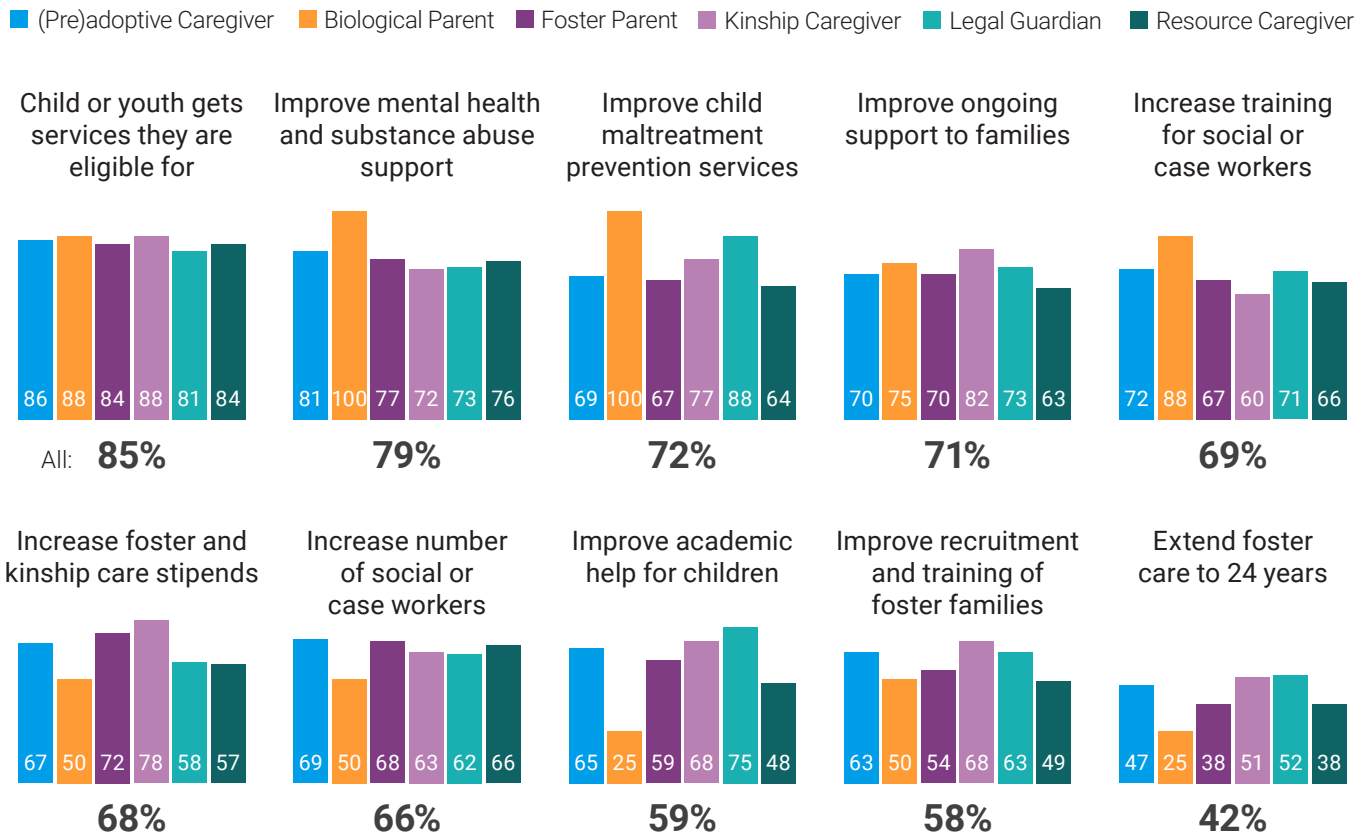
— Adoptive/Pre-Adoptive Parent Caregiver, Georgia

“The focus needs to be on preventing youth from entering the foster care system in the first place and supporting kinship placements. There is a huge discrepancy in support between foster parents and kinship parents.”

— Advocate or Other Supportive Adult, Washington



**FIGURE 8:** Caregivers of former and current foster care youth tell the Biden administration about their needs



Q: What should the Biden Administration and government work on immediately?

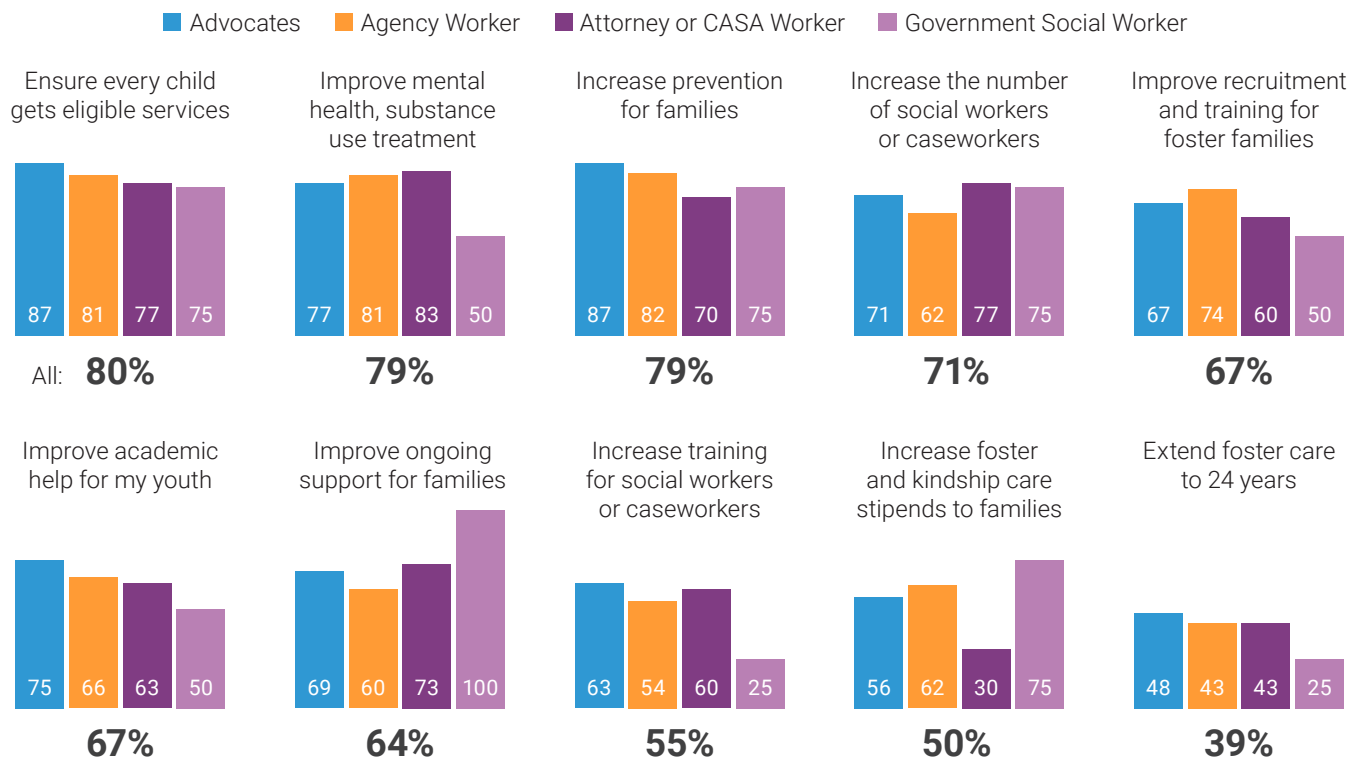
Similarly, workers and advocates (See Figure 9) were asked their opinion about what the Biden administration could focus on with respect to children and families. Workers and advocates had similar answers to youth and caregivers, with issues of eligibility (80%) and improved mental health and substance abuse treatment (79%) as priorities; however, they identified increased child maltreatment prevention as an important focus for the Biden administration (79%). Additionally, they highlight the need for trauma-informed care and training for everyone involved with children and families:

“Trauma-informed training should be mandatory for all foster parents and professionals working with foster youth.”

— Advocate or Other Supportive Adult, New York

“Youth and families who are involved with or at risk of becoming involved with the child welfare system deserve timely and equitable access to behavioral health services that are permanency oriented, trauma informed, and designed to provide continuity of care as placement needs change. There must be universal access to services at a level commensurate with each child’s need, regardless of the delivery system that provides those services. Unfortunately, system-level obstacles often prevent youth from receiving responsive behavioral health care. This is true across all service systems, including managed care, county mental health plans, and the substance use disorder treatment system.” — Agency Worker, California

**FIGURE 9:** Workers and advocates identify for the Biden administration areas of focus and need among current and former foster care youth



Q: What should the Biden Administration prioritize working on to improve child welfare?

Notably, 100% of social workers indicated the need for improved and ongoing support for families. The goal should be to prevent removal and minimize the time spent in foster care for children.

“If we could think of ways to preserve the biological families, the country as a whole would benefit. Many children are currently in the system due to the opioid crisis. Focus some resources on prevention. We need to be proactive, not reactive.”

– Foster Parent Caregiver, Texas



# V. Conclusion

Current and former foster youth, their caregivers, and front-line child welfare workers have spoken. They told of a failing, underfunded system that must do better for the children in our nation's care. Those with lived experience have stated unequivocally that the fundamental issue with child welfare is that the system doesn't prioritize the well-being of the child.

"I have noticed that everybody involved wants the children's best interests to be the priority. What I've noticed, however, is that the process becomes the priority." — **Foster Parent Caregiver, Arizona**

As a result, issues of systemic inequalities, resource scarcity, lack of permanency and inability to adequately prepare youth aging out to be self-sufficient plague the system. Over-worked front-line workers, under-trained and under-supported caregivers and ever-present, under-addressed trauma further exacerbate the ability of those in the system to successfully raise the children in their care. Tragically, the stories revealed in this report and further documented from 49 states and the District of Columbia in statements from youth, caregivers, and front-line workers available for all to read on the dedicated website for the Voice of the Community, [www.voiceoffostercare.org](http://www.voiceoffostercare.org) are not unique or aberrations, they are the norm.

Prior to the release of this report, iFoster has shared it with nearly 50 transition-age youth from across the country, both still in care and aged out, who had not completed the survey for their feedback. Sadly, to a youth they confirm the results.

"I relate to everything in this report. It's crazy how many similar stories to mine were told. And still nothing is done." — **Former Foster Youth Who Read the Report, California**

The situation however is not hopeless. It is by amplifying the voices of those living in and working in the child welfare system that change can and will happen. iFoster is committed to giving voice to those within the community through its annual survey and report to inform the field, federal and state governments, and the taxpayers who fund the child welfare system. Already the Voice of the Community survey results have informed our work at iFoster and the support of policies that align with the survey results and recommendations. We are cross-walking federal and state budgets, and proposed bills with the Voice of the Community year one results and have identified, will support, and will amplify those funding proposals and bills that align with what those most impacted by the child welfare system have to say. These analyses are available and will be continually updated on the website dedicated to the Voice of the Community, [www.voiceoffostercare.org](http://www.voiceoffostercare.org) for all to read and support.

Our second annual survey, informed by this first one and the input of transition-age foster youth reviewers, will be released on May 1st, 2022. National Foster Care Month will now be the time, every year, that the input of those with lived experience — those living in and working daily on the front lines of the child welfare system — will be sought. iFoster will provide not only a national view of the well-being of the children and youth growing up in the child welfare system, but a state-by-state drill down, to drive actionable change with measurable improvements.

The Voice of the Community report is a call to action. Our children and youth in care deserve better and we, collectively, can act. Ultimately, it is our responsibility as taxpayers to hold those in leadership positions whether policy or practice to account for the lived experience of our most vulnerable children in the state's care.

## This is how you can act:

1. Ensure your elected officials understand that the child welfare system you are paying for is failing our children. Go to [www.voiceoffostercare.org](http://www.voiceoffostercare.org) and send your elected officials a message telling them to read the report.
2. Become an informed taxpayer. Go to [www.voiceoffostercare.org](http://www.voiceoffostercare.org) and learn about the child welfare system, read what children, youth, caregivers and front-line foster care workers in your state have to say about it, and review simple ways you can help drive change.
3. Engage in your local foster care community. Everyone can help raise a child in foster care. Go to [www.voiceoffostercare.org](http://www.voiceoffostercare.org) for ways you can invest in our country's most vulnerable children and ensure that youth aging out of foster care can become successful, productive adults.

**Together we can put our children at the center of the child welfare system we fund.**

# VI. Appendix

## How the COVID-19 Pandemic Amplified Inequities and Hindered Permanency for Children and Families

In each survey tool, key stakeholders were asked about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the well-being of youth and caregivers, as well as workers and advocates and their interactions with the child welfare system. Here is information obtained from the survey questions and open-ended spaces where participants shared their perspectives.

### The COVID Pandemic Exacerbated Existing Challenges for Youth, Caregivers, Workers, and Advocates

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all children and families, but communities of color and vulnerable populations, like foster care children, have been disproportionately affected by pandemic-related challenges. Findings from the iFoster data corroborate other accounts of challenges in this population. In the current survey, 66% of current foster care youth and 70% of former foster care youth identified anxiety about the future as the most significant challenge

to overcome during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, current foster care youth identified increased anxiety for the future (66%), feelings of social isolation (66%), and mental health (51%) as challenges brought by the pandemic. Similarly, former foster care youth identified similar challenges of anxiety for the future (70%), challenges related to social isolation (68%) and mental health issues (64%) as obstacles during the pandemic (see Table A1). A major concern for former foster care youth was food instability; 59% of former foster youth in the sample indicated they did not have enough food at certain times during the pandemic.

“Foster youth have historically struggled in their education. Now that the pandemic has affected so many of us, it is even more difficult. Ensuring that we have a place to live, food to eat, utilities, and electronics to continue succeeding are essential.”

– Youth Formerly in Foster Care, New Jersey

**TABLE A1:** Current and former foster care youth on COVID-19-related challenges for youth and families

%	All Respondents	Current Foster Youth	Former Foster Youth
Increased anxiety for the future	69	66	70
Feeling isolated	67	66	68
Mental health issues	59	51	64
Employment loss or inability to get employment	52	35	62
Food insecurity	49	33	59
Lack of visitation with my family	43	50	39
Falling behind in school	41	51	35
Housing instability	40	26	48
Inability to get health care service	34	24	39
Inability to get other necessary services	34	28	37
Inability to connect with social or case workers	21	24	18

Caregivers identified similar challenges as current and former foster care youth. Overall, caregivers indicated that social isolation (73%), children falling behind in school (61%), and increased financial anxiety (54%) escalated due to the COVID-19 pandemic (see Table A2).

“These children depend on the school system as part of their foundation and way to get resources! Having schools closed, there is little support except our CASA program! There should be grants available to foster care children’s CASA’s so they can help them connect to individual resources. Tutoring and mental health counseling has been very neglected during the past year of this pandemic!” – **Foster Parent Caregiver, California**

The identified challenges varied considerably by caregiver type. For example, among biological caregivers, 63% reported they had challenges related to employment loss and 38% reported significant food insecurity; these were higher than in other caregiver types.

Workers and advocates also observed significant challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic (see Table A3). Among all respondents, the top three concerns for workers and

advocates during the COVID-19 pandemic were: falling behind in school (75%), the lack of visitation for children, youth, and families (61%), and worry about an increase in the number of children who enter foster care (60%).

“The lack of in-person visits and courts have fallen behind have caused a delay in children being returned to their bi-families in a timely manner. Lowering caseload numbers would allow workers and advocates to better assist families and their needs instead of being spread so thin.” – **Agency Case Worker, New York**

Another caseworker, also from New York, acknowledged the conflict between self-care and the needs of the families:

“We are front-line workers! I have been doing home visits during the entire pandemic. I have underlying health conditions that require me to pay attention to triggers for my autoimmune disorder, asthma, and allergies. A stipend for essential workers, working in the homes of our clients, would be beneficial to all of those workers out there like me, with ‘invisible disabilities’.”  
– **Agency Case Worker, New York**

**TABLE A2: Caregivers on COVID-19-related challenges for youth and families**

%	All Respondents	(Pre) adoptive Caregiver	Biological Parent	Foster Parent	Kinship Caregiver	Legal Guardian	Resource Caregiver
Feeling isolated	73	74	88	72	85	67	70
Children are falling behind in school	61	73	25	57	58	42	59
Increased financial anxiety	54	60	63	53	41	50	41
Lack of health services for kids	46	45	50	49	32	38	46
Concerned about caregiving ability	30	13	0	42	20	27	37
Lack of visitation for children in my care	30	14	38	38	34	21	21
Employment loss or unemployment	29	27	63	26	30	58	26
Difficulty connecting with social or case worker	21	9	50	30	17	12	25
Food insecurity	15	13	38	13	26	29	13
Inability to pay rent or mortgage	9	10	25	7	10	27	8



**TABLE A3:** Workers and advocates on how COVID-19-related challenges have affected their ability to support families

%	All Respondents	Advocates	Agency Worker	Attorney of CASA Worker	Social Worker
Children or youth are falling behind in school	75	81	78	63	75
Lack of visitation for my children or youth or families	61	42	74	80	64
Worry about an increase in foster care	60	71	74	37	52
Lack of placements for the children or youth I support	54	40	68	27	64
I cannot connect with children or youth regularly	50	48	51	80	36
Lack of transitional housing for youth aging out	47	54	35	40	59
I cannot get health services for children or youth	42	33	40	50	47
Increased financial anxiety for myself or my family	27	23	35	13	28
Inability of children or youth's caregivers to continue	19	15	31	7	17
Lack of training and support to be able to do my job	19	19	24	7	20

Caregivers, as well as workers and advocates made recommendations to Congress regarding where the approved increase in funding should be spent. In the sample, 82% of caregivers (see Table A4) advocated for an increase in monthly spending by at least 1.5 times the current amount, whereas 50% of caregivers acknowledged a great need for respite care for caregivers. Assistance with virtual health care appointments (34%) and technology for virtual visitations (32%) were also recommended.

"There is a shortage of foster homes, yes. But it does no good to recruit new families but not work to retain the ones you already have. During this pandemic, at the

heart of things for retention of the families already in the trenches, current foster families need more stipend money. More money will put more food on the table for kids who are home much more now. ... More money will put better technology in the home for education, make tutoring affordable, provide childcare for older children now home who didn't traditionally need it and children in forced quarantine from school. ... More money would help foster parents pay for respite services, so they don't burn out during these unprecedented and difficult times. A higher stipend would help greatly with retention and positively affect many other concerns."

– Foster Parent Caregiver, South Carolina

**TABLE A4:** Caregivers recommend to Congress increased funding for foster families during the COVID-19 pandemic

%	All Respondents	(Pre) adoptive Caregiver	Biological Parent	Foster Parent	Kinship Caregiver	Legal Guardian	Resource Caregiver
Increase monthly spending by at least 1.5 times	82	76	50	89	66	69	82
Provide respite care for caregivers	50	44	13	56	54	44	49
Virtual health care appointments	34	32	63	33	32	31	45
Facilitate technology for virtual visitations	32	22	38	39	29	10	47
Provide rent or mortgage forgiveness	27	23	38	28	34	37	25

Finally, workers and advocates made specific recommendations to Congress about how the increased foster care funding should be spent (See Table A5). More than half (61%) of workers and advocates indicated that families should receive an increase for 2021 by at least 1.5 times their current rate. Sixty-one percent of caseworkers also indicate that technology should be provided to families for virtual visitations and 56% said that it should be used for virtual health appointments.

“One is that this pandemic has shown how much systems rely on the internet, and the disparate access people have to it. Foster kids are more exposed to challenges with access to the internet, both in terms of technology (devices) and the availability of service providers. A problem we’ve encountered is ensuring youth in care [have] devices ... or provide replacement devices when they get broken. It seems that budgets are too tight to provide the necessary resources. Ensuring universal Wi-Fi and having enough money for devices would help foster children access the curriculum.”

– Agency Case Worker, New York

**TABLE A5:** Workers and advocates recommend to Congress increased funding for foster families during the COVID-19 pandemic

%	All Respondents	Advocates	Agency Worker	Attorney of CASA Worker	Social Worker
Increase stipend for 2021 and 2022 by at least 1.5 times	61	56	74	67	52
Enable virtual visitations, providing tech to families	61	50	74	50	63
Enable virtual health care appointments	56	56	54	73	53
Provide respite care for caregivers	56	63	54	30	67
Provide rent or mortgage forgiveness	45	52	44	37	45
I do not support any families in foster or kinship care	7	12	6	3	8

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