



The Honorable Bob Casey
United States Senate
393 Senate Russell Building
Washington, DC 20510

July 23, 2015

Dear Senator Casey:

On behalf of the First Focus Campaign for Children, a bipartisan advocacy organization dedicated to making children and families the priority in federal policy and budget decisions, I would like to express our support for the *Health Insurance for Former Foster Youth Act of 2015*. This legislation removes a significant barrier to health coverage for young people aging out of foster care.

Recognizing the importance of health care coverage for youth who age out of foster care, Congress specifically provided Medicaid coverage for this population in the ACA. This provision equalizes coverage among young adults, placing young people aging out of foster care on par with their peers who are now able to stay on their parent's insurance until age 26.

The expansion of Medicaid to cover certain youth previously in foster care to age 26 is a significant victory for this population because it provides access to critical health coverage for an especially vulnerable group of young adults. Medicaid coverage will help young people become successful adults by ensuring that they, like their peers, have health care coverage and by removing barriers to success in post-secondary education and employment that can result from unexpected health care costs, unmet medical needs, and unaffordable insurance premiums or co-payments.

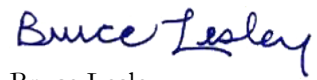
Not surprisingly, youth aging out of foster care experience poor health outcomes into adulthood, including high rates of drug and alcohol use, unplanned pregnancies and poor mental health outcomes. More than half of former foster youth report being uninsured, and more than one-fifth report unmet needs for medical care. Findings from the Midwest Study highlight that one-third of youth aging out reported two or more emergency room visits in the past year, 22 percent were hospitalized at least once, 43 percent were uninsured, fewer than half had dental insurance, three-quarters of young women had been pregnant, and 19 percent received mental or behavioral health care in the past year.

Given that former foster youth have well-documented and often significant health care needs, these young people should be eligible for Medicaid coverage in any state, and once enrolled, should be able to retain their coverage irrespective of changes in residency. Yet in their interpretation of the statute, CMS gave states the option to cover youth under this group who were in foster care and Medicaid in any state at the relevant point in time, but did not require that they do so. As a result, to date, only 13 states have taken up the option to extend coverage to youth who age out in another state.

Unfortunately, with a majority of states opting to not cover youth aging out in other states, many young people will be left without essential medical coverage. It is critical that we remove any barriers to coverage for young people aging out of care, and that includes removing the eligibility restriction tied to residency. The *Health Insurance for Former Foster Youth Act of 2015* does just that.

We thank you for your leadership in introducing this legislation and believe that it has the potential to help thousands of former foster youth obtain essential health coverage, pursue promising opportunities and build better lives and futures. We look forward to working with you in the future to continue to promote such efforts aimed at improving the wellbeing of all our nation's children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bruce Lesley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent loop at the end of the last name.

Bruce Lesley
President