

California Child Welfare Council
Child Development and Successful Youth Transitions Committee

Foster Youth Employment
Model Policy for Priority Hiring at the County & State Levels

Policy Recommendation Summary

1. Hire foster youth (current/recently-emancipated) into entry-level currently available county/state/city jobs for which they are eligible; necessitating no new jobs / budget.
2. Develop and implement policies that explicitly give hiring preference to current and former foster youth. Create a process to facilitate hiring preference, if this does not already exist.
3. Create multiple opportunities for foster youth to gain critical job skills to lead to permanent employment including, but not limited to, paid internships, Work Experience Program (WEX) positions, and part-time, semi-permanent positions across county departments. Align these opportunities with current Independent Living Program requirements.
4. Hire former foster youth for entry-level, full-time, permanent, and benefitted positions throughout county and State departments.
5. Require that foster youth be informed of their rights pursuant to sealing juvenile records and prohibitions on being asked about their juvenile records, during the transition plan development.
6. Inform youth of their right to be given preference by state agencies for internships and student assistant positions.

Solution Description

Counties across California can increase access to workforce development and employment opportunities for current and former foster youth by hiring eligible, current/recently emancipated foster youth into open entry-level jobs that are currently available.

Simply put, offer open positions at the county/city/state level to qualified foster youth/emancipated foster youth – necessitating no new ‘jobs,’ to be created, and no new budget to be appropriated.

Based off results from the State of Texas’s model, Santa Clara County’s, and various state policies – it is known that this policy works. There are other ways to achieve employment, and some practices are outlined below.

The reason for this policy is necessary & achievable: California foster youth are ill prepared to become self-sufficient by the time they age out of care. According to Chapin Hall, findings from the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study 2014, less than 20% of transition-age foster youth feel prepared to be independent and succeed. With limited and sporadic employment

during their time in foster care, it is not surprising that by age 24 over 50% will be unemployed and those employed will be earning on average only \$7,500 a year. The result is 50% will spend time homeless and 70% will be on some form of government assistance.

To this end, the *Priority Employment Workgroup of the CDSYT Committee* developed the following recommendations:

1. Develop programs that offer internship, part or full-time employment for current and former foster youth, using current models as a guide

The results of a statewide survey to county child welfare directors indicate that at least eight counties have programs that offer internship, part or full-time employment for current or former foster youth that could serve as a model for new programs. The existing programs fall into three main categories:

A. Short Term Paid Internships (Los Angeles)

These short-term (i.e. 120 hour, 300 hour) internships offer current and former foster youth the opportunity for paid work experience in county departments, non-profit, public and private companies. While positions are typically for summer employment, these work experience internships can exist throughout the year and are paid for by county child welfare, department of education, individual disability education act funding, workforce investment boards, or other youth serving programming. Interns are hired after an interview and may be provided a job coach or additional training during the program to develop the core competencies they need to succeed in the workplace. County departments participate voluntarily in the program, and there is not a dedicated path to permanent county employment at the end of the internship. Youth who wish to apply for permanent county positions must go through the normal competitive hiring process and meet those eligibility criteria. This type of internship would be open to youth ages 16 and up.

B. Longer Term Paid Internships (San Diego, San Mateo, Los Angeles)

These internships offer current and former foster youth the opportunity to work in an entry-level position in a county department for 6-18 months. Positions may be part or full-time. Interns are hired after an interview and may be provided a job coach or additional training during the program to learn professional and interpersonal skills. County departments participate voluntarily in the program, and there is not a dedicated path to permanent county employment at the end of the internship. Youth who wish to apply for permanent county positions must go through the normal competitive hiring process. This type of internship would be open to youth ages 18 and up who have already completed high school or equivalent.

C. Pathway to permanent, full-time employment (Santa Clara, Los Angeles)

This type of program offers current and former foster youth a pathway to permanent, full-time employment in a number of county departments. Youth are hired into the program after an interview for an entry-level position in a county department. Once hired through the program, youth are eligible to apply to a permanent county position by successfully passing an employment examination within a set period of time (3 months in Santa Clara and 24 months in Los Angeles). In Santa Clara, participating youth are hired as permanent employees as long as they pass their employment exam. In Los Angeles, participating youth must go through the competitive examination process (which includes a ranking of exam scores), but they compete only against other participating youth, not the general public.

Both programs offer supportive services to youth as they apply for the program, and Los Angeles's program provides job coaching and life skills training to youth during the program. In Los Angeles, each county department is required by the Board of Supervisors to host a youth from the program, but in Santa Clara, participation by county departments is voluntary.

In addition to the above opportunities, county HR departments may want to collaborate with the Independent Living Program (ILP) to provide job skills training to current/former foster youth who are hired for county jobs/internships. This allows HR to tap into an existing resource, instead of re-inventing the wheel. LA County has done this and could advise other counties on doing so.

D. A limited number of semi-permanent, full-time positions within the Child Welfare department (Los Angeles, Riverside, Merced, Mariposa, San Bernardino)

Five counties have programs that hire former foster youth as full-time employees in the Child Welfare department to serve as peer advocates for foster youth or assist social workers with case management. The number of positions tends to be limited (most counties have no more than 7 employees in this role), and the employees work only within Child Welfare. While the position is not time-limited, it is also not supposed to be permanent and employed youth are expected to transition to other employment in 3-4 years. Youth are typically hired through an interview and need not take an employment exam for this position. There is not a dedicated path to other county employment through this position.

2. Implement Strategies to Remove Barriers to Success in Employment Programs, such as:

A. Advise and facilitate current and former foster youth to have their juvenile records sealed and inform them that employers cannot ask them about juvenile court records, but most corporate employers will require a voluntary background check.

Judges, attorneys, social workers, counselors, and others who have contact with youth in the dependency system should advise youth of their rights regarding juvenile records under current law and any changes to law that occur over time. These professionals should be prepared to assist current and former foster youth seal their juvenile records

where possible and expunge their non-sealable juvenile and adult records. These professionals should make available Judicial Council forms to complete the sealing possible. These professional should inform all current and former foster youth of the importance of sealing and/or expunging their records and the impact that an unsealed record may have on their ability to earn gainful employment. These professionals should also be available to answer questions a youth or young adult may have about record sealing.

Employers are not permitted to ask applicants for employment to disclose information concerning an arrest or detention that did not result in a conviction. This provision was recently expanded with the addition of Labor Code Section 432.7 (AB 1843) that prohibits an employer from asking an applicant for employment to disclose, or from utilizing as a factor in determining any condition of employment, information concerning or related to an arrest, detention, processing, diversion, supervision, adjudication, or court disposition that occurred while the person was subject to the process and jurisdiction of juvenile court law with specified exceptions for employment at health facilities.

However, since most corporate and government employers conduct background checks and requests as a condition of employment a candidate to voluntarily submit to such a check, a juvenile and/or adult record can be uncovered. It is paramount that counties have processes in place to ensure that current and former foster youth understand the impact having a record may have on their ability to earn gainful employment and provide them with guidance on how to ensure their records are sealed and/or expunged. If neither can be accomplished, counties should advise their youth of alternative employment opportunities including, but not limited to, employers who do not conduct background checks and employers who work with recidivism candidates.

B. Inform current and former foster youth that they must be given preference by state agencies hiring interns and student assistants

Effective January 1, 2017, Government Code Section 18220 requires: “(a) State agencies, when hiring for internships and student assistant positions, shall give preference to qualified applicants who are, or have been, dependent children in foster care. The preference shall be granted to applicants up to 26 years of age. (b) For purposes of this section, ‘preference’ means priority over similarly qualified applicants for placement in the position.” All counties should advise youth in foster care regarding this provision of the law. The California Human Resources Department (CalHR) is developing guidance for state agencies to implement this statute.

3. Prepare foster youth for employment and success in the workplace with comprehensive job skills development that focuses on critical soft skill development in addition to the hard skills of interviewing, resume writing and job search.

Within current Independent Living programming, counties should implement comprehensive job skills training leveraging evidence-based and evidence-informed curriculums tailored to foster youth that are both trauma-informed and focus on soft skill development (e.g., work

ethic, effective communication, dealing with critical feedback, integrity, team work, critical thinking).

Strategies for Local County Implementation: Hiring Current and Former Foster Youth

Government Code Sections 19800-19810 require counties and the state to establish personnel standards in regulatory form necessary "to assure state conformity with applicable federal requirements." These standards are broad, flexible guidelines reflecting generally accepted personnel practices that provide for meeting the federal and state requirements by local agencies and are applicable to both Approved Local Merit Systems and the Interagency Merit System directly administered by the State Personnel Board.

Approved Local Merit System Counties

In Approved Local Merit Systems (ALMS), the State Personnel Board Executive Officer reviews each system for sufficient conformity with applicable Federal requirements. If sufficient conformity is found, the approval will be continued. There are 31 counties in California that have Approved Local Merit Systems: Alameda, Butte, Contra Costa, Fresno, Kern, Kings, Los Angeles, Marin, Mendocino, Nevada, Orange, Placer, Riverside, Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Francisco, San Joaquin, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, Santa Barbara, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Shasta, Solano, Sonoma, Stanislaus, Tulare, Ventura, Yolo, and Yuba.

Each of these counties can work with the Board of Supervisors, County Human Resources, and various county departments to create a policy that gives preference to former foster youth for employment. There are at least eight counties that can serve as models for implementation, as well as numerous other districts across the country.

Interagency Merit System Counties

The departments administering state and federally funded programs in local agencies which have not met the criteria for Approved Local Merit System status constitute the Interagency Merit System, administered through the State Personnel Board and California Department of Human Resources (CalHR). CalHR contracts with CPS HR Consulting to provide the requisite services to counties that receive federal funds in their Social Services, Child Welfare, and Child Support Service Departments to ensure compliance with state and federal hiring requirements. The service provided by CPS HR Consulting is named *Merit System Services (MSS)*.

<http://www.mss.ca.gov/>

There are currently 27 counties in California that are part of Merit System Services: Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Colusa, Del Norte, El Dorado, Glenn, Humboldt, Imperial, Inyo, Lake, Lassen, Madera, Mariposa, Merced, Modoc, Mono, Monterey, Napa, Plumas, San Benito, Sierra, Siskiyou, Sutter, Tehama, Trinity, and Tuolumne.

Counties referenced above use *Merit System Services* for job recruitment and selection process, appointments/promotions/demotions, discipline and appeals, layoffs, seniority, position classification, probationary periods, reinstatements/transfers, and appeals processes. The Merit System Services has a “Peer Coach I” and “Peer Coach II” job classification that can be used by these counties as one mechanism for hiring permanent, full-time, foster youth.

While the Peer Coach classifications do not specifically call out preference to former foster youth, it does require “current or previous experience as a client who received social or health and human services.” Counties can also work with MSS to develop a specific job classification for foster youth similar to the MSS position Foster Parent Liaison to specifically identify and prioritize preference for former foster youth.

MSS positions may be limited to Child Welfare, Social Services and Child Support Services, but the same job classifications and specifications may also be used to develop county jobs for former foster youth that are in other departments. County Administrators, Board of Supervisors, and County Human Resources will need to work together to prioritize resources, develop policies and implement a structure for hiring and giving preference to former foster youth.