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# Youth May Re-enter Foster Care Up to Age 21

JUNE 14TH 2013 BY DEE LOFLIN

Youth May Re-enter Foster Care Up to Age 21


*Submitted by  
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**Missouri** - Gov. Jay Nixon today signed two bills into law to allow older youth who have exited foster care to return to foster care if reentry would be in the young person's best interests. The Governor signed Senate Bill 205 and Senate Bill 208 at the Boone County Courthouse, home to Missouri's 13th Judicial District. Currently, there are 356 foster children in Missouri's 13th Judicial District.

"Young people who exit foster care at age 18 without a strong support system are at greater risk of homelessness and poverty," Gov. Nixon said. "Being on your own at 18 may sound like a good idea, but sometimes older foster youth need to be able to return to that safety net to make sure they get started on the path to a healthy adulthood and successful life."

"Children in foster care deserve the same opportunities as their peers to grow up knowing that people care for them and are committed to helping them reach their full potential," said State Senator Jolie Justus, sponsor of Senate Bill 208. "I have worked with and represented many foster children in my career, and I was proud to support them again in sponsoring this legislation. I appreciate the Governor's commitment to this issue and his signing of the legislation today."

"Missouri is a state that has made tremendous strides in supporting, encouraging and providing for our older foster youth," said State Senator David Sater, sponsor of Senate Bill 205. "I was proud to put forward this legislation to continue our deep commitment to helping foster children in southwest Missouri, and all across the state, succeed. I applaud the work of Governor Nixon and my colleagues in the General Assembly to make this bipartisan legislation a reality."

Senate Bills 205 and 208 contain language raising the maximum age from 18 to 21 at which an older youth who  has been released from foster care can return to foster care if reentry would be in the youth's best interests. As in current law, the petition to reenter foster care can be initiated by the Department of Social Services, the juvenile officer, or directly by the youth.

This change was among the recommendations made by a 2009 Blue Ribbon Task Force on youth aging out of foster care. Research shows that youth who remain in care beyond their 18th birthday have better outcomes than youth who are released from care when it comes to employment, health, education, incarceration and homelessness.

"When a young person exits foster care around their senior year of high school, their next steps can be difficult to navigate without someone there to point them in the right direction," said Vince Hillyer, President and CEO of Great Circle, an organization that provides treatment, education, prevention and support services to foster children. "This legislation is critical to ensuring that these young people, like most young people, have a support system that they can rely on beyond their eighteenth birthday. We applaud the Governor for his actions today and for his longstanding commitment to Missouri children and families."

"As an organization that represents 10,000 vulnerable children in Missouri and over 50 non-profit organizations who care for those children, we applaud the Governor and the Missouri General Assembly for passing this important piece of legislation," said Mary Chant, CEO of Missouri Coalition of Children's Agencies. "By extending this safety net for young people in foster care by just a few years, we can make sure they stay healthy, safe and successful as they become young adults."

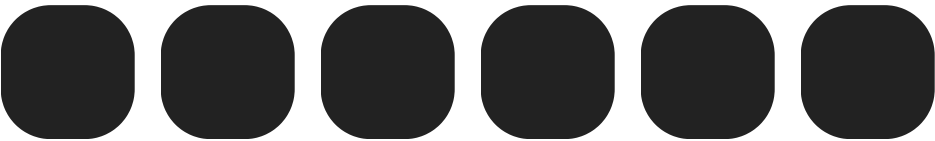
Additionally, Senate Bill 205 provides assistance to older youth in foster care or a Division of Youth Services program with visiting a state university, community

college, technical college or with a military services recruiter prior to the youth exiting state custody.

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