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Economic Matters Committee
Chair
Business Regulation Subcommittee

House Chair, Veterans Caucus
Chair, Southern Maryland Delegation

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

September 25, 2020

The Honorable Larry J. Hogan
Governor
State of Maryland
100 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland, 21404

Re: Executive Order to Protect Children Aging Out of Foster Care During the COVID Crisis

Dear Governor Hogan,

Thank you for your leadership and partnership during this unprecedented public health crisis. We appreciate the steps you have already taken to address the issues impacting our state. Despite Maryland's efforts, it has become painfully clear that more needs to be done for our most vulnerable youth involved in our child welfare system, specifically youth who are set to age out during the pandemic.

Youth "aging out" of the system to live on their own are among the most vulnerable in our state, and unfortunately, the status of their vulnerability has increased during the pandemic and will continue to do so during this extraordinary time. Aging out of care during the current pandemic places youth at a heightened risk of unemployment, food insecurity, homelessness, and exacerbated mental illness.¹

Due to the zealous advocacy of child welfare advocates and the commitment of the Department of Human Services (DHS) to prioritize the well-being of youth in their care, DHS has issued a temporary moratorium policy, but unfortunately it creates a piecemeal moratorium on youth aging out of the system during the pandemic. The temporary extension set to end September 30, was just extended for only one month to October 31, 2020. While we appreciate this effort, this very limited incremental approach undermines the ability of youth in care and local departments of social services to effectively plan and prepare for discharge and causes considerable stress for youth.

We are writing to request you issue an executive order that allows youth to remain in foster care after their 21st birthday and for at least 180 days after the last county in the state has fully re-opened.

Some states, like Illinois, have announced that young adults in foster care will be allowed to stay in care "until the pandemic crisis is over." On April 24, Ohio's governor, Mike DeWine, announced that "...the state will cover the costs of all these youth (aging out) until this pandemic ends". South Carolina, too, has suspended age requirements to enable youth turning 21 during the pandemic to remain in their placement until after the "pandemic has ceased." It is unconscionable that no comparable plan exists in a state with the resources that Maryland has.

¹ The Impact of COVID-19 on Youth from Foster Care: A National Poll (Foster Club May 13, 2020)

In short, we urge you to quickly consider issuing an executive order that will allow youth aging out of the foster care system to remain in care where they have access to housing, viable employment and other supportive services. Investing in Maryland's young people during the pandemic and beyond is not only the right choice for Maryland, it's the only choice.²

Thank you in advance for your attention to this very important matter.

Sincerely,



Delegate C.T. Wilson



Delegate Geraldine Valentino-Smith

Delegate Dalya Attar
Delegate Vanessa E. Atterbear
Delegate Heather Bagnall
Delegate Lisa Belcastro
Delegate Harry Bhandari
Delegate Benjamin Brooks
Delegate Jon Cardin
Delegate Lorig Charkoudian
Delegate David Fraser-Hidalgo
Delegate Catherine M. Forbes
Delegate Michele Guyton
Delegate Julian Ivey
Delegate Carl Jackson
Delegate Michael A. Jackson
Delegate Steve Johnson
Delegate Dana Jones
Delegate Anne R. Kaiser
Delegate Marc Korman
Delegate Carol L. Krimm

Delegate Mary A. Lehman
Delegate Karen Lewis Young
Delegate Brooke Lierman
Delegate Jazz Lewis
Delegate Sara Love
Delegate Eric G. Luedtke
Delegate David Moon
Delegate Julie Palakovich Carr
Delegate Joseline Pena-Melnyk
Delegate Susie Proctor
Delegate Kirill Reznik
Delegate Mike Rogers
Delegate Sheila Ruth
Delegate Emily Shetty
Delegate Jared Solomon
Delegate Vaughn Stewart
Delegate Jen Terrasa
Delegate Kriselda Valderrama
Delegate Jay Walker
Delegate Nicole A. Williams

cc: Speaker Adrienne Jones
cc: Secretary Lourdes Padilla

² According to Maryland DHS, if the moratorium were extended to December 31, 2020, this would impact 188 youth, at a cost of \$1,591,664.