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Position Argument Revision

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Raising the Age for Independence

Independence is usually a time for celebration as one matures into adulthood at the age of eighteen, they imagine a life full of freedom to do as they please with no more household rules to follow. However, in reality, it is not as sweet as many imagined it to be during their childhood. Today, adults are presumed to have work experience, built credit, an education, a form of transportation, employment, and their own home. Some newly independent eighteen year olds actually possess such assets and qualities, but almost all of them are not doing it alone and receive assistance from their families, which is completely acceptable. In real life, it is nearly impossible for a teen that has been supported throughout their entire life, to wake up one day and survive on their own single-handedly. Unfortunately, youth in foster care face such impossibility on a daily basis.

The official age for foster youth to be released from states custody is eighteen years old, and many are emancipated before eighteen. For foster youth, independence is not a time for celebration, but only a reminder that it is almost time to “age out.” In other words, it is time to survive unaided. When youth age out of care, their shelter, food, transportation, support funds, etc. discontinue despite their circumstances. In most cases, foster youth have experienced

traumatizing events throughout their childhood that has caused them to end up in states custody. Such events may include neglect, mental, physical, or emotional abuse; which all have an immense impact on an individual throughout their entire life. In addition, majority of these youth have never been taught necessary skills to survive on their own, and as a result, they lack many qualities adults must possess in order to acquire a well-paying job to support themselves.

According to the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute, “Each year, over 27,000 youth “age out” of foster care without the emotional and financial support necessary to succeed. This number has steadily risen over the past decade. Nearly 40% had been homeless or couch surfed, nearly 60% of young men had been convicted of a crime, and only 48% were employed. 75% of women and 33% of men receive government benefits to meet basic needs. 50% of all youth who aged out were involved in substance use and 17% of the females were pregnant.”

As a former foster child, I myself have experienced some of the staggering, unfortunate possibilities after aging out of care, and have witnessed the negative impacts on foster youth who age out. Sadly, they were all of my former foster sisters, friends, and brothers. A few made it through an alternative high school or obtained a GED, but not one of them furthered to pursue higher education. They have all experienced homeless, along with me. They have all have had children, sold, or abused illegal substances, and some are completely addicted.

Evidently, the odds for a successful future after aging out of care are not great. This is why I propose that the government alters the legal “age out” to 21-years-old, along with discontinuing early emancipation unless the teen has proven they can met specific requirements and are capable of making a successful living for themselves. If these youth are provided with a home, a family, guidance, and support, they can focus on working, and going to school rather

than bills; doing this will open up possibilities for them and provide an opportunity to further their educations, and skills.

On the other hand, many arguments may oppose this idea because it will be costly to our economy, which is already in serious debt. Some might also object this solution due to the already extremely low amount of foster homes available to younger children still in custody. While both arguments are completely understandable, as citizens in America, we must realize that there will always be families in need and relying on the government for survival, and we can never change that, it would be impossible.

However, we also need to focus on long-term success. If the government alters the legal “age out” to 21-years-old, this can improve the economy immensely in the long run. Even though it will be costly by paying foster families for an extended three years, it will later save the country money if this change is made rather than not. Reasons being, this change has the potential to increase the national numbers of people with diplomas and degrees in the future. As well as decrease the amount of individuals whom rely on government funding, such as disability checks, unemployment, Medicaid, food stamps, and WIC. Likeminded, Senate Majority Leader Rodney Tom, D-Medina stated, “When we’re spending dollars, we need to make sure we’re spending dollars that are going to deliver outcomes, you’ve got to use your heart, but also your head — where can we really make a difference? Not just a difference in feeling good, but a difference in outcomes, and a difference for taxpayers” (Foster Kids: Aged out and alone at 18).

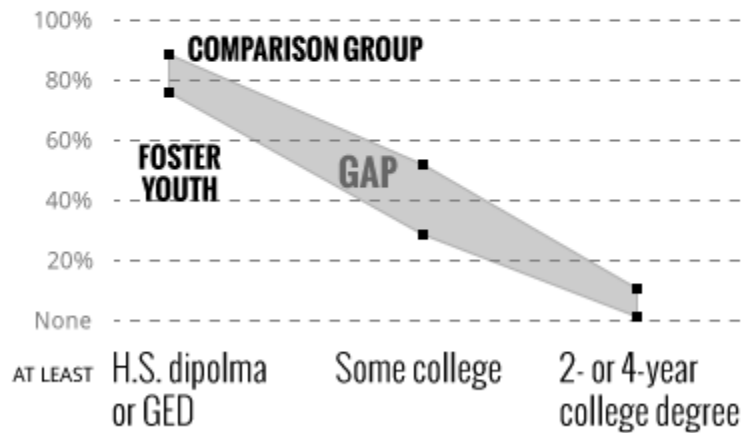
Nevertheless, while everyone searches for ideas to better our economy, a life changing solution is right in front of us. Personally, with the given statistics and personal experience, a smart solution that will help our economy in the long run, will be to raise the age of the “age out”

requirement from 18-years-old to 21-years-old for foster youth. Evidently, eighteen is not a suitable age for anyone to pursue independence alone. Everyone needs assistance, guidance, connections, and relationships at some point in life in order to get where we want in the future. Still, many people are in need but are uncared for, forgotten, and alone; most of them are the youth in our country today.

Starting Out Behind:

A 2007 study compared foster youth at age 21 to other young adults at the same age. The findings are striking: outcomes for the foster youth were significantly worse across a host of measures of well-being and earning potential.

Here, educational achievement:



PRODUCED BY: JASON ALCORN/INVESTIGATEWEST
SOURCE: CHAPIN HALL/OUTCOMES AT AGE 21, 2007

Graph from www.crosscut.com

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