



Independent Women's Voice Supports The Foster Youth Workforce Opportunity Act

April 16, 2025

Dear Members of Congress,

Independent Women's Voice is pleased to support the **Foster Youth Workforce Opportunity Act (H.R. 7343)** as a common-sense workforce development solution for a uniquely vulnerable population, youth in foster care.

Youth aging out of foster care often face poor economic outcomes: high rates of unemployment, lower wages, and significant homelessness. Add to that early parenthood and substance abuse. Only **56%** of youth who were in foster care at age 17 were currently employed part- or full-time by age 21. By age 26, youth who turn 18 in foster care report **50%** lower earnings and employment rates that are 20 percentage points lower by age 26 compared to young adults with similar levels of education. As many as one-third of these youth experience homelessness.

Helping youth in foster care successfully transition into adulthood and independence is the reason Congress enacted the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program in 2001. This was the first federal program to assist young adults in or formerly in foster care with their postsecondary education needs. The ETV program provides up to \$5,000 per year to young people with foster care experience to help them pay for postsecondary education or training. The program has demonstrated success as ETV was correlated with better educational outcomes for young adults.

However, the ETV is weighted toward recipients pursuing two-year and four-year degrees. Degrees can pay off, but take years to obtain. Importantly, college is not the only, or the best, pathway to a sustainable career and financial independence for every young person.

The Foster Youth Workforce Opportunity Act recognizes this shortcoming and proposes expanding ETV funds for short-term certification programs that provide direct and quick access to employment, apprenticeship programs, GED programs, and remedial education.

Workforce training and job-ready skills are valuable complements to postsecondary education, giving these youth access to many more choices and opportunities.

Thank you, Representatives Max Miller and Dwight Evans, for your leadership in expanding the horizons and improving the economic outcomes for vulnerable youth in foster care. Independent Women's Voice applauds the Foster Youth Workforce Opportunity Act and stands ready to support your efforts to advance these bills through Congress and to President Trump for signature.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Patrice Onwuka', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Patrice Onwuka
Vice President for Economic Policy
Independent Women's Voice