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Report to the Subcommittee on Worker and Family Support, Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives

May 2019

FOSTER CARE

States with Approval to Extend Care Provide Independent Living Options for Youth up to Age 21

GAO-19-411

GAO Highlights

Highlights of GAO-19-411, a report to the Subcommittee on Worker and Family Support, Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Youth who leave the foster care system at age 18 are often ill-prepared to live on their own and may face challenges as they transition to adulthood, such as difficulties finding stable housing. The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 allowed states to receive federal reimbursement through title IV-E of the Social Security Act for a portion of the cost of extending care to certain eligible youth up to age 21. The Act also allows youth ages 18 up to 21 to live in a supervised setting in which the individual is living independently. One such setting may be an apartment, with monthly check-ins with a case worker (referred to as supervised independent living arrangements).

GAO was asked to review supervised independent living arrangements and services for older youth. Among other things, this report examines (1) the types of supervised independent living arrangements available; (2) factors states reported considering when placing youth in these living arrangements; and (3) how selected states prepare youth to live independently.

GAO surveyed state child welfare agencies in the 26 states approved by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to receive federal funding to support their extended foster care programs; interviewed state and local child welfare officials and stakeholders in five states selected for factors such as variation in child welfare administration systems; reviewed relevant federal laws, regulations, and guidance; and interviewed HHS officials.

View GAO-19-411. For more information, contact Kathryn A. Larin at (202) 512-7215 or larink@gao.gov.

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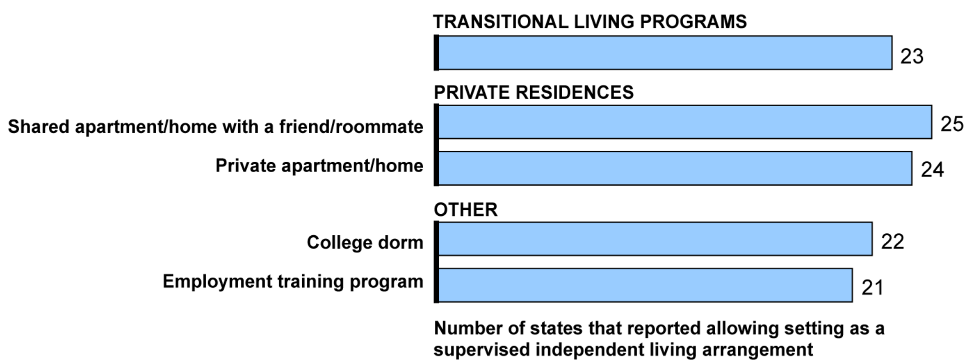
States with Approval to Extend Care Provide Independent Living Options for Youth up to Age 21

What GAO Found

The 26 states that have approval to receive federal funding to support their extended foster care programs for youth ages 18 up to 21 reported providing a range of supervised independent living arrangements. These arrangements include transitional living programs, private residences, and other settings (see figure). Officials we spoke with in five selected states said transitional living programs typically involve private child welfare agencies that lease apartments or facilities for youth, either at a single site or scattered across a geographic area, and offer on-site case management and supports to help youth build independent living skills. For private residences, youth may choose where to live, such as a private or shared apartment. In these cases, youth are typically responsible for their own lease, and may receive minimal supervision compared to youth in transitional living programs. For other settings, states reported options such as college dorms and residential employment training programs. Nineteen states also reported allowing youth under 18 to live in supervised independent living settings in certain instances, such as when they are pregnant, parents, or attending college, although such placements are generally not eligible for federal funding.

Common Types of Supervised Independent Living Arrangements Offered in the 26 States with Federally Funded Extended Foster Care for Youth Ages 18 to 21



Source: GAO survey of state child welfare agencies in states with approval to receive federal funding to support extended foster care. | GAO-19-411

Factors that most states reported considering when placing youth in supervised independent living arrangements include the youth's life skills—for example, their ability to budget finances and schedule medical appointments—as well as their education and employment status. Officials in selected states also said they consider the availability of housing, which may be limited in certain localities due to a lack of affordable housing options or other factors, and the options available to youth with complex needs, such as those who are pregnant and parents.

Officials in four selected states said they help prepare youth in extended foster care to live independently by providing targeted trainings and other supports, such as financial literacy training. In all five selected states, youth can also learn independent living skills through services offered more broadly to all older youth in foster care, officials said, including assistance with housing, education, employment, and daily living skills, such as grocery shopping and budgeting.

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Abbreviations

ACF	Administration for Children and Families
AFCARS	Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System
AFDC	Aid to Families with Dependent Children
Chafee Program	John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood
Fostering Connections Act	Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008
HHS	Department of Health and Human Services
NYTD	National Youth in Transition Database
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

GAO U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

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May 21, 2019

The Honorable Danny Davis
Chairman
The Honorable Jackie Walorski
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Worker and Family Support
Committee on Ways and Means
House of Representatives

In fiscal year 2017, over 440,000 children were in the foster care system, largely due to neglect. Data from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), show that nearly 102,000 of these children were youth nearing adulthood (ages 14 and up). Our prior work and other research studies have found that youth in foster care are likely to face challenges as they transition to adulthood.[1] For example, studies conducted in three midwestern states found that youth transitioning to adulthood and out of state foster care systems at age 18 had lower rates of high school completion and enrollment in postsecondary education by age 19, compared with the general population. These youth also experienced physical or psychological trauma which may have affected their mental health. Additionally, they faced housing instability and had higher rates of other economic hardships compared with the general population.[2]

States may use federal funding to assist youth in foster care as they transition to adulthood under title IV-E of the Social Security Act (title IV-E), which authorizes federal support for state foster care and adoption assistance programs.[3] The Fostering Connections to Success and

[1]See the Related GAO Products page at the end of this report for more information.

[2]These studies also found that these youth often face difficulties with substance use disorders, pregnancy and parenthood, intimate partner violence, and criminal justice system involvement as they transition to adulthood. See Mark E. Courtney et al., *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 19,* Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago (Chicago, Ill.: 2005); *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 21,* Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago (Chicago, Ill.: 2007); and *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 26,* Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago (Chicago, Ill.: 2011).

[3]Title IV-E is codified at 42 U.S.C. §§ 670-679c. In order to participate in title IV-E, states must have a plan approved by the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (Fostering Connections Act) allowed states to receive federal reimbursement under title IV-E for a portion of the cost of extending foster care to certain youth beyond their 18th birthday, up to age 21.[4] Federal reimbursement under title IV-E is generally limited to eligible youth removed from homes with very low incomes, among other eligibility criteria.[5] The Fostering Connections Act also authorized federal reimbursement to support youth in foster care ages 18 up to 21 who are placed in a supervised setting in which the youth is living independently.[6] States generally have discretion to determine the types of settings that meet this requirement. Such settings may include independent living arrangements, such as the youth's own apartment, with monthly check-ins with a case worker, referred to as supervised independent living arrangements. The amendments made by the Fostering Connections Act do not preclude states from placing youth under age 18 in supervised independent living arrangements. However, states generally may not seek federal reimbursement for placing youth under 18 in these settings.[7] In addition, the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee Program) provides funding to states for independent living services, such as mentoring, educational assistance, and vocational training, to support

[4]See Pub. L. No. 110-351,122 Stat. 3949. The Fostering Connections Act also amended other parts of the Social Security Act, including part B of title IV, which authorizes federal funding for certain child welfare services. For this review, we focused primarily on title IV-E of the Social Security Act. The amendments made by the Fostering Connections Act allow states the option to extend foster care to youth ages 18 or older (but who have not attained 21 years of age), provided the youth meet certain criteria.

[5]Income eligibility varies by state but is below the federal poverty line in most states, according to the Congressional Research Service.

[6]Codified at 42 U.S.C. § 672(c)(2).

[7]Youth under age 18 generally must be placed in a foster family home or in a child-care institution, as defined by title IV-E, to qualify for federal reimbursement. In some instances, states may place youth under 18 in settings described as supervised independent living, such as transitional living programs, that may also meet the definition of a foster family home or child-care institution under title IV-E and, as such, may qualify for federal reimbursement.

older youth in foster care and youth who have recently left foster care.[8] Despite these efforts to increase supports for youth in foster care transitioning to adulthood, little is known about the living arrangements offered to youth ages 18 to 21 in states where extended care is offered (extended-care states), especially how states have set up supervised independent living arrangements, and the types of services that assist these youth.

You asked us to explore the types of independent living arrangements and services available to older youth. This report examines (1) the types of supervised independent living arrangements available to youth in extended-care states, (2) what factors extended-care states reported considering when placing youth in supervised independent living, (3) what federal and other sources extended-care states use to fund supervised independent living arrangements for youth, and (4) how selected extended-care states prepare youth to live independently.

To address each research question, we designed and administered an electronic survey of state child welfare agencies in the 26 states approved by HHS to offer federally funded extended care as of February 2018.[9] The survey was conducted between August and October 2018 and we obtained a 100 percent response rate. The survey included open-ended and closed-ended questions about states' policies and practices regarding supervised independent living arrangements, states' data on youth in extended care and in supervised independent living, state spending and funding sources for these living arrangements in state fiscal

[8]42 U.S.C. § 677. The Family First Prevention Services Act, enacted in February 2018 as title VII of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018, renamed the Chafee Program, formerly known as the "John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program," and made other changes to the program, such as specifying that it is available to youth who have experienced foster care at age 14 or older, and allowing states to provide the program to youth up to age 23, under certain circumstances. Pub. L. No. 115-123, § 50753, 132 Stat. 64, 263-266. For this report, we did not review any changes states made in response to this law.

[9]The 26 extended-care states discussed in this report are those that opted to extend foster care under the Fostering Connections Act and received approval from HHS that their program meets title IV-E requirements, making their extended care programs eligible for partial federal reimbursement of state costs under title IV-E. In this report, we refer to these programs as being "federally funded." Other states may offer extended foster care services to youth ages 18 and older that have not been approved by HHS as meeting title IV-E program requirements; these programs are not eligible for title IV-E funds and must be fully supported with state or other funds. For this report, all references to extended-care states include the District of Columbia.

year 2017, as well as questions about data reliability. We also analyzed states' responses on the number of youth in extended care and the number of youth in care that were eligible for title IV-E reimbursement in state fiscal year 2017 to determine their title IV-E eligibility rate for the fiscal year.

To ensure the quality and reliability of the survey, we pretested the questionnaire with three extended-care states that vary in geographic location and numbers of youth in care, among other factors. We conducted the pretests to check (1) the clarity and flow of the questions, (2) the appropriateness of the terminology used, (3) if the information could be easily obtained and whether there were concerns about the reliability of data that would be collected , and (4) if the survey was comprehensive and unbiased. We revised the questionnaire based on the pretests. We reviewed responses to assess if they were consistent and contained all relevant information, and followed up as necessary to determine that states' responses were complete, reasonable, and sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report; we excluded data where we had concerns about their reliability.[10]

To complement information gathered from our survey, we held in person and phone interviews with selected child welfare stakeholders in five states—California, Illinois, Maryland, New York, and Tennessee. We selected the states based on several factors, such as variation in child welfare administration systems (i.e., state- versus county-administered), geographic location, and length of time HHS-approved extended care has been in effect, among other factors. Stakeholders who participated in the interviews included officials from state and local child welfare agencies and representatives from 20 private child welfare agencies working with state or local child welfare agencies to provide supervised independent living arrangements or independent living services. In the states we visited in person—California, Illinois, and Maryland—we also spoke with youth ages 18 to 21 in extended care, and toured supervised independent living settings for these youth. The information gathered in the five selected states is not generalizable to all extended-care states. To obtain more information about states' options for implementing extended care and supervised independent living arrangements, as well as funding these arrangements, we also interviewed HHS officials. Additionally, we

[10]Specifically, we followed up with 17 states via email, and in November 2018 conducted phone interviews with three states.

reviewed relevant federal laws, regulations, and HHS policies and related research.

To develop our methodologies, we reviewed related literature and interviewed child welfare experts. During this process, we explored analyzing federal data on youth in foster care from two federal databases: (1) the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS)[11], and (2) the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD).[12] We determined these databases to be insufficiently reliable for our reporting purposes due to concerns about the completeness of the data pertaining to extended care services and participants.[13] Additionally, we determined that the data collected through our survey and site visits would be sufficient to address our research objectives.

We conducted this study from January 2018 to May 2019 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained

[11]AFCARS, a database maintained by HHS, includes data reported semi-annually by state child welfare agencies on (1) all children in foster care for whom the agency has responsibility for placement, care, or supervision, and (2) all adopted children in the state who were placed by the agency or for whom the agency is providing adoption assistance, care, or services. The AFCARS reporting population includes all children in foster care under age 18, regardless of whether they receive title IV-E foster care payments. According to HHS, youth ages 18 to 21 are required to be included in the reporting population only if they are receiving a title IV-E payment. AFCARS contains point in time information on placement settings, case plans, and length of time in foster care, among other information. Revisions to the AFCARS reporting requirements are scheduled to take effect Oct. 1, 2020; however, ACF has proposed delaying their implementation until Oct. 1, 2021 while it seeks public comment on streamlining AFCARS data elements and addressing burden related to AFCARS reporting. See Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, 83 Fed. Reg. 11,450 (Mar. 15, 2018) and 83 Fed. Reg. 11,449 (Mar. 15, 2018).

[12]NYTD is a database maintained by HHS that includes data submitted by states every 6 months on youth who receive independent living services paid for or provided by the state agency that administers the Chafee Program. Additionally, states are required to report on the results of surveys conducted with cohorts of youth in or aging out of foster care to examine certain well-being, financial, and educational outcomes as they get older.

[13]Stakeholders, including ACF officials, raised concerns about the consistency and completeness of AFCARS data for all extended-care youth, and said that NYTD may not include consistent data on the independent living services provided to youth in foster care since these services may be underreported.

provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

Foster Care Placements

When children are removed from their homes, state or local child welfare agencies are typically responsible for coordinating their placement and provision of services. State or local child welfare agencies may also contract with private child welfare agencies to help them administer child welfare services.

Child welfare agencies often place children in a foster home or in group care settings, depending on the child's needs.[14] Children placed in foster families may live with unrelated foster parents, relatives, or fictive kin (e.g., close family friends who are not relatives). Group care settings—also known as congregate care—typically include group homes and child care facilities that provide 24-hour care and/or treatment for groups of children. For example, these settings may include child care institutions, residential treatment facilities, or maternity homes, according to HHS.[15] Child welfare agencies may provide foster caregivers with a monthly payment (referred to as a foster care maintenance payment) to help cover the costs of a child's care, as determined by each state.

Children generally remain in foster care until a permanent suitable living arrangement can be made, either by addressing the issues that led to the child's removal and returning the child to his or her family; or through adoption, guardianship, placement with a relative, or another planned permanent living arrangement. In some cases, the child reaches adulthood before leaving foster care, commonly referred to as "aging out" of foster care. Historically, aging out typically occurred at age 18, but some state-funded programs implemented prior to the enactment of the

[14]In this report, we use the terms "placement" and "living arrangement" interchangeably to refer to the settings where youth are placed by their child welfare agency.

[15]Starting Oct. 1, 2019, states may not receive federal reimbursement for children placed in certain congregate care settings for more than 2 weeks, under amendments to title IV-E made by the Family First Prevention Services Act. This limitation does not apply to, among others, youth ages 18 or older who are placed in a supervised independent living setting. See Pub. L. No. 115-123, § 50741, 132 Stat. 64, 253-257 (2018).

Fostering Connections Act in 2008 allowed youth to remain in care beyond their 18th birthday.

Federal Funding for Child Welfare Programs

Title IV-E of the Social Security Act authorizes federal funding to state child welfare agencies to help cover the costs of operating their foster care programs. ACF administers title IV-E and oversees states' foster care programs for compliance with IV-E requirements.[16] Title IV-E is the largest single federal source of funding for child welfare programs, comprising about 89 percent of federal child welfare appropriations in fiscal year 2017 (approximately $7 billion of nearly $7.9 billion), according to ACF. Under title IV-E, states can access funding for their foster care programs in a few ways.

- **Title IV-E reimbursements:** Title IV-E funds may be used to reimburse states for a portion of expenses to support the daily care and supervision of eligible youth in foster care (such as for food, clothing, and shelter). The eligibility requirements generally limit reimbursements under title IV-E to youth that were removed from homes with very low incomes, among other criteria.[17] However, some states have received waivers from certain title IV-E funding

[16] As a condition of receiving federal funds under title IV-E, states must comply with various program requirements. For example, among other things, state child welfare agencies are required to develop a case plan for each child receiving foster care maintenance payments. For youth age 14 and older, the case plan must include a written description of programs and services to prepare the youth for the transition from foster care to a successful adulthood. See 42 U.S.C. §§ 671, 675.

[17] Specifically, the youth must have been removed from a home that would have qualified for cash assistance under the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program as of July 16, 1996. AFDC, originally the Aid to Dependent Children program, was first established by the Social Security Act of 1935 as a grant program to enable states to provide financial assistance for needy children who were deprived of parental support or care due to a parent's death, continued absence from the home, or physical or mental incapacity. In 1996, Congress replaced AFDC with the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. Other title IV-E eligibility criteria include (1) the child's removal and placement is in accordance with either a voluntary placement agreement or a judicial determination that continuation in the child's home would be contrary to the child's welfare and reasonable efforts were made to prevent the need for removal or that such efforts would be inappropriate; (2) the child's placement and care are the responsibility of the agency administering the HHS-approved title IV-E plan; and (3) the child has been placed in a foster family home or child-care institution that meets certain requirements. 42 U.S.C. § 672.

requirements to carry out HHS-approved demonstration projects.[18] According to HHS, under these waivers states receive a capped allocation of title IV-E funds for youth in foster care, and these funds are generally reserved for youth under age 18.

- **Chafee Program funds:** The Chafee Program provides funding to states, under title IV-E, for support services that are intended to assist eligible youth in the transition to adulthood. Chafee Program funds are allocated to each state based on the state's proportion of the nation's foster care caseload.[19] Through the Chafee Program, states can offer services to youth who have experienced foster care at ages 14 or older, youth who are likely to age out of foster care, and certain older youth who have aged out or left the foster care system. States generally have flexibility in determining the goals, strategies, and other features of their Chafee programs, as long as states design and conduct their programs based on the key purposes outlined in the law.[20] Chafee Program services may include help with education, employment, financial management, housing, and emotional support through mentoring. State and county child welfare agencies may contract with private entities to provide these services. Up to 30 percent of a state's Chafee Program allotment may also be used for

[18]To be approved for a demonstration project, states had to show their projects were cost neutral to the federal government (i.e., states cannot receive more in title IV-E reimbursement than they would have received in the absence of the project), among other requirements. HHS was authorized to approve new demonstration projects through fiscal year 2014, and all current waiver demonstration projects must terminate operations by Sept. 30, 2019. 42 U.S.C. § 1320a-9. According to HHS officials, most demonstration projects use a capped allocation of funds as the means for assuring federal cost neutrality, based on a projection of their historical title IV-E expenditure trends. These officials said that many states chose to exclude from their allocation any allowable title IV-E claims for youth ages 18 to 21 because the historical title IV-E expenditure trends used to determine their allocation were for periods before implementation of the title IV-E extended foster care program. States that excluded claims for youth ages 18 to 21 from their allocation and that opted into the title IV-E extended foster care program may claim title IV-E funds on behalf of this population, in addition to the funding provided under the waiver, according to HHS.

[19]For example, California, which has one of the nation's largest foster care caseloads, received over $22 million in Chafee Program funds in federal fiscal year 2017, according to HHS data. In comparison, New Hampshire, which has a smaller foster care caseload, received approximately $600,000 in Chafee Program funds in the same fiscal year. States are also required to provide matching contributions of 20 percent.

[20]To receive Chafee Program funds, states must have a plan approved by HHS that meets program requirements. The statutory purposes include, among others, supporting youth who have experienced foster care at age 14 or older in their transition to adulthood, and helping these youth achieve meaningful, permanent connections with a caring adult.

room and board costs for certain eligible youth.[21] According to HHS data, services provided under the Chafee Program may vary by state, including the extent to which states provide room and board financial assistance services.

While title IV-E is the primary source of federal funding available to states for child welfare programs and services, states may also use other federal funds, such as title IV-B of the Social Security Act, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Social Services Block Grant funds, as well as Medicaid.[22] State child welfare agencies also generally combine state and local funds with federal funds to support their programs. According to a state survey funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Casey Family Programs, in state fiscal year 2014, 43 percent of all child welfare expenditures were from federal sources, and 57 percent were from state and local funds.[23]

Federal Option to Extend Care

Since the Fostering Connections Act was enacted in 2008, HHS has as of February 2018 approved 26 states and six federally recognized tribes to claim title IV-E funding to extend foster care to youth ages 18 to 21.[24] According to ACF, most of these states (19 of 26) began offering federally funded extended care between 2010 and 2012, with one state beginning to provide extended care as recently as 2018.

[21] 42 U.S.C. § 677, as amended by Pub. L. No. 115-123, § 50753, 132 Stat. 64, 263-266 (2018). Youth who qualify for the Chafee Program may also be eligible for the Chafee Education and Training Voucher Program, which authorizes federal funds to states to help eligible youth pay for postsecondary education and training. See 42 U.S.C. § 677(i).

[22] Title IV-B of the Social Security Act provides grants to states for programs directed toward several goals, including protecting and promoting the welfare of children and preventing child maltreatment. TANF is a block grant to states to operate programs that address at least one of four goals, including to provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes. Social Services Block Grants are a flexible funding source that allows states to tailor social service programming to their population's needs, toward goals such as preventing and remedying the neglect and abuse of children. Medicaid is a joint federal-state program that finances health care services for certain low-income individuals. Most children in foster care are eligible for Medicaid.

[23] Child Trends, *Child Welfare Financing SFY 2014: A survey of federal, state, and local expenditures* (Bethesda, MD.: 2016). The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization with a stated mission to help build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. Casey Family Programs, a separate private charitable organization established by the founder of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, states its mission as to provide, improve, and ultimately prevent, the need for foster care.

[24] We excluded tribes from our review of extended-care states.

States have several different options for implementing their extended care programs.[25] For example, in order to be eligible for extended care, title IV-E requires a youth to meet at least one of five employment or education conditions specified in the statute. States can choose to use all or some of these conditions to determine which youth are eligible for their extended care program (referred to in this report as "eligibility criteria"). In addition, states can utilize supervised independent living settings for youth in extended foster care—a placement setting not typically available for federal reimbursement for youth under age 18. (See table 1 and fig. 1).

Table 1: Selected State Options for Implementing Federally Funded Extended Foster Care for Youth Ages 18 to 21

State options	Description of state options
Eligibility criteria	States that extend care may seek title IV-E reimbursement for participating youth only if the youth meets at least one of the following criteria: (1) is completing high school or a program leading to an equivalent credential; (2) is enrolled in an institution that provides postsecondary or vocational education; (3) is participating in a program or activity designed to promote, or remove barriers to, employment; (4) is employed at least 80 hours per month; or (5) is incapable of doing any of the activities described above due to a medical condition. States may choose to apply all or some of these criteria to determine which youth can participate in their federally funded extended care program.[a]
Age limit	States can set the maximum age of eligibility for federally funded extended care to 19, 20, or 21.[b]
Placement and re-entry into extended care	States may structure their extended care programs to allow youth to stay in foster care continuously or to leave care and return after turning 18 and before they reach the maximum age of eligibility, provided the youth meets the title IV-E eligibility criteria.
Payments directly to youth	For youth age 18 or older living independently in a supervised setting where there is no foster care provider or child placement agency involved, the child welfare agency may (but is not required to) pay all or part of the foster care maintenance payment directly to the youth.

Source: GAO analysis of selected provisions of 42 U.S.C. § 675 and Administration for Children and Families program instruction. | GAO-19-411

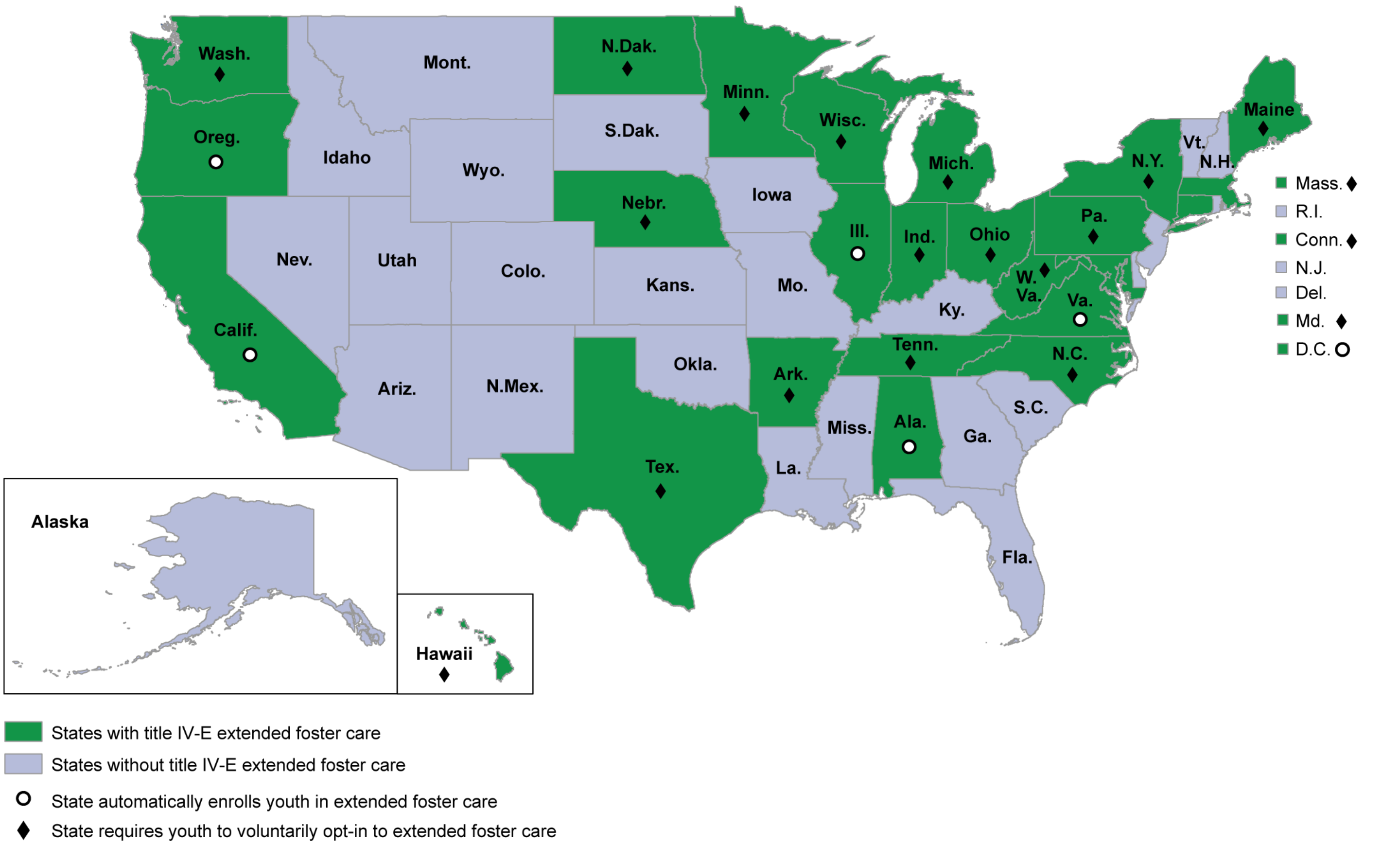
Note: In this table, federally funded means that the state's costs for carrying out the program are eligible for partial federal reimbursement under title IV-E of the Social Security Act (title IV-E).

[a]Twenty-three of the 26 extended-care states chose to adopt all five of the eligibility criteria for extended care. Three states chose not to adopt all five. Specifically, in West Virginia, youth can only participate in extended care if they are enrolled in secondary or postsecondary educational programs. In Tennessee, youth must be completing secondary or postsecondary education, or have a medical condition that prevents them from participating in these activities. In Wisconsin, participation in extended care is limited to youth completing secondary education who also have a documented disability.

[b]Twenty-five of the 26 extended-care states set the maximum age of eligibility at 21. Indiana extends foster care to age 20.

[25]See generally 42 U.S.C. § 675(8)(B). In 2010, HHS issued a program instruction to states on implementing the Fostering Connections Act, including guidance on extended foster care and supervised independent living. See ACYF-CB-PI-10-11 (July 9, 2010).

Figure 1: States Approved by HHS to Offer Federally Funded Extended Foster Care for Youth Ages 18 to 21, as of February 2018



Sources: GAO analysis of documentation from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and survey of state child welfare agencies in extended-care states. MapInfo (map). | GAO-19-411

Note: For the purposes of this report we included the District of Columbia as an extended-care state. In this figure, federally funded means that the state's costs for carrying out the program are eligible for partial federal reimbursement under title IV-E of the Social Security Act (title IV-E).

Supervised Independent Living

The amendments made by the Fostering Connections Act permit states to use title IV-E funds to place eligible youth age 18 or older in supervised settings in which the youth live independently.[26] According to a research brief sponsored by ACF, supervised independent living settings are unlike other foster care placement options (such as foster homes and group

[26] 42 U.S.C. § 672(c)(2).

homes) because they are primarily intended for youth in extended care.[27] States may place youth under age 18 in supervised independent living settings, but, as previously noted, they generally may not seek federal reimbursement for foster care maintenance payments for youth under 18 in such settings.

According to ACF's program instructions for implementing the Fostering Connections Act, state child welfare agencies have the discretion to develop a range of supervised independent living settings which can be reasonably interpreted as consistent with the law, including whether such settings need to be licensed and any safety protocols that may be needed. These instructions state that child welfare agencies may determine that—when paired with a supervising agency or supervising caseworker—host homes, college dormitories, shared housing, semi-supervised apartments, or other housing arrangements meet the supervised setting requirement. Youth in such settings may not have onsite caregivers and often have increased responsibilities, such as paying bills, assuming leases, and working with a landlord, according to ACF documentation. However, youth may receive foster care services, such as financial support and case management, to help them become successful adults. Additionally, ACF encouraged child welfare agencies to continue to work with youth who are in supervised independent living settings to ensure that youth form permanent connections with caring adults. This could include exploring options for guardianship, adoption, or living with other caring adults, and helping youth work towards those outcomes.[28]

[27]Department of Health and Human Services, Amy Dworsky and Denali Dasgupta, *Housing for Young Adults in Extended Federally Funded Foster Care: Best Practices for States,* OPRE Report #2018-24, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (Washington, D.C.: July 2018).

[28]See ACF Program Instruction. ACYF-CB-PI-10-11 (July 9, 2010).

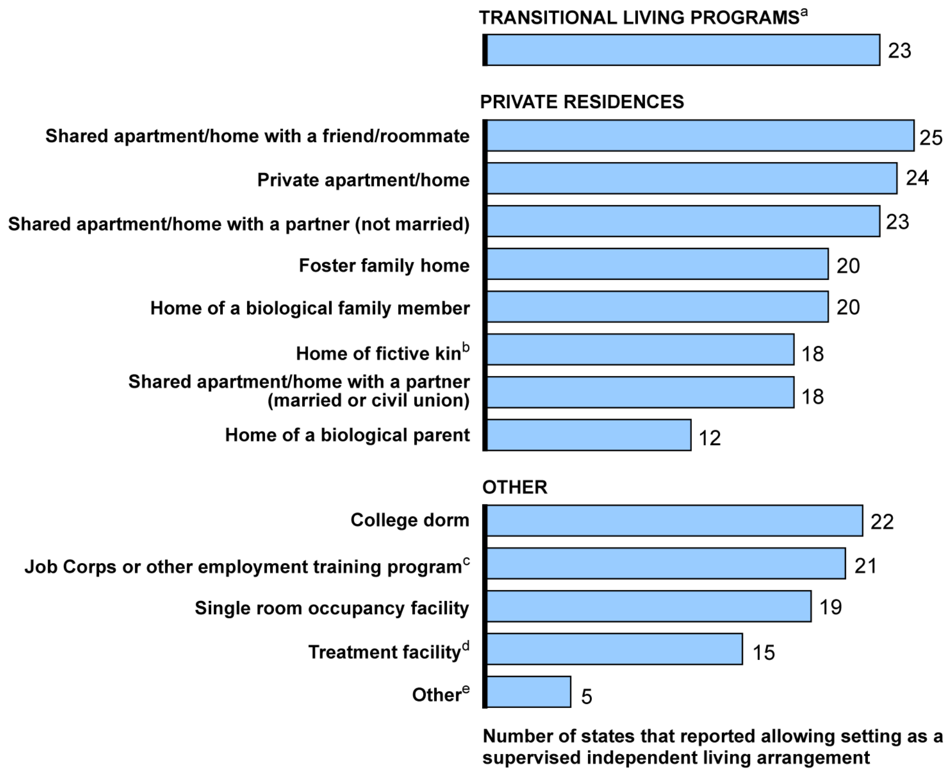
Extended-Care States Reported Providing a Range of Supervised Independent Living Options and Some Allow Youth Under 18 to Live Independently

Supervised Independent Living Arrangements in Extended-Care States Range from Group Settings with On-site Staff to Individual Apartments with Minimal Supervision

In response to our survey, all 26 extended-care states reported offering a variety of supervised independent living arrangements as a placement option for older youth in care, with most of the options falling largely in two broad categories—transitional living programs and private residences—in addition to a range of other types of supervised independent living settings (see fig. 2). Overall, across 21 of the 26 extended-care states for which we analyzed placement data, about 34 percent of youth in foster care who were ages 18 to 21 were placed in supervised independent living settings in state fiscal year 2017 (see appendix I for additional information).[29]

[29]We excluded five states that reported point in time data that did not reflect their entire state fiscal year 2017, or data that were not reliable for the purposes of our analysis. States also reported data on the number of youth ages 18 to 21 in supervised independent living arrangements versus other types of placements (such as foster homes) during state fiscal year 2017. See appendix I for this information.

Figure 2: Types of Supervised Independent Living Arrangements the 26 Extended Foster Care States Reported Offering



Source: GAO analysis of survey of state child welfare agencies in extended-care states. | GAO-19-411

Note: Extended-care states are states (including the District of Columbia) that have been approved by the Department of Health and Human Services to extend foster care to youth ages 18 to 21 under title IV-E of the Social Security Act. Supervised independent living generally refers to alternative living arrangements, paid for or provided by the state child welfare agency, where youth live independently but receive foster care services, such as financial support and case management, to help them become a successful adult. Youth in such settings may not have onsite caregivers and often have increased responsibilities, such as paying bills, assuming leases, and working with a landlord, according to Administration for Children and Families documentation,. States may use different terms for supervised independent living, such as semi-independent living, supervised independent living program, and transitional living program. We asked states to provide data on these settings based on the manner in which these terms are used in their state, and treated these terms synonymously for the purposes of our survey.

[a]A transitional living program can refer to a type of supervised independent living arrangement that provides youth with the opportunity to practice daily independence and may include on-site case management and other supports. These programs can range from a group of youth living in a single family home to youth living in apartments dispersed across a geographical area.

[b]Fictive kin means that there is a psychological, cultural, or emotional relationship between the child or the child's family and the foster parent(s), and there is not a legal, biological, or marital connection between the child and the foster parent. Examples of fictive kin include mentors, godparents, or close family friends.

[c]Job Corps is a residential, educational, and career and technical training program for low-income youth generally ages 16 through 24. Job Corps is administered by the Office of Job Corps in the Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration.

[d]According to Administration for Children and Families guidance, states may consider substance abuse, mental health, or other adult residential treatment facilities as a supervised independent living arrangement if there is child welfare agency supervision and the youth is voluntarily enrolled in treatment.

[e]Other settings states reported include host homes, e.g., a family home with a rented room or garage apartment with access to a kitchen and laundry facilities; a non-college dorm setting; emergency housing, e.g., a hotel or other short-term housing for no more than 45 days; or anywhere deemed safe and suitable.

Transitional Living Programs

Twenty-three of the 26 extended-care states reported that they offer transitional living programs as a type of supervised independent living arrangement. Generally, officials said these programs provide youth with the opportunity to practice daily independence and may include on-site case management and high levels of support built into regular programming. Supports may include experiential learning activities to build independent living skills, such as grocery shopping and budgeting. Local officials in California told us that transitional living programs are a stepping stone to independence, and they encourage older youth to start in one of these programs before living on their own. In our discussion groups with youth in extended care, youth told us transitional living programs helped them gradually move towards more independence and learn how to pay bills on their own.

Officials we spoke with in the five selected states—California, Illinois, Maryland, New York, and Tennessee—described transitional living programs that use single-site or scattered-site models, or both, ranging from a group of youth living in a single family home to youth living in apartments dispersed across a geographical area (see table 2).

Table 2: Description of Transitional Living Program Models in Five Selected States

Characteristics	Single-site model	Scattered-site model
Physical set-up	Youth may occupy all units within an apartment complex, a few units within an apartment complex, or live in a dormitory-style single family home or facility. The private agency operating the program typically holds the master lease for the apartments or facility. An apartment unit or other on-site space is typically reserved for staff offices and programming activities.	Youth may live in apartment units dispersed across a geographical area. The private agency operating the program typically holds the master lease and rents the unit to youth in the program.
Target population	Youth who are ready for some independence but may benefit from on-site staff and regular programming.	Youth who are ready to live with more independence and less staff presence.
Staffing and supervision	May have on-site staff supervision, up to 24 hours a day. Typically includes a curfew for youth.	No on-site staff. Youth typically receive less frequent supervision. Youth may receive weekly in-person contact with case workers. May not include a curfew.
Financial assistance	Program typically pays for youth's housing costs and living expenses. In addition, it may provide a stipend for personal expenses such as phone bills, food, and clothing.	Program may provide a stipend to youth for their housing costs and living expenses. Youth are typically encouraged to contribute to these costs as well.
Other supports	Regular programming to teach independent living skills, e.g., on-site group sessions about cooking, financial literacy, and conflict resolution.	Regular programming to teach independent living skills, e.g., off-site training on cooking, financial literacy, and conflict resolution.

Source: GAO analysis of interviews with state and local officials, private child welfare agencies, and discussion groups with youth in selected extended foster care states. | GAO-19-411

Note: The five selected extended foster care states are California, Illinois, Maryland, New York, and Tennessee. Transitional living programs in these states may use one or both of the program models (single-site or scattered-site).

Local caseworkers may continue to check in with youth in both single-site and scattered-site transitional living programs, but private agencies operating these programs are typically responsible for providing more frequent case management and supervision, according to officials in the selected states (see text box). One youth in a scattered-site program in California told us that he meets with his county case worker every couple of months, but he meets with program staff on a weekly basis and sometimes several times a week.

Example of pregnant and parenting transitional living program in California

A program we visited in California focused on supporting young mothers ages 18 to 21 in extended foster care and those who transitioned out of foster care up to age 24, as well as their children. The program provides supports on site, such as parenting classes and child care. The site is located at a former hospital that was repurposed to serve youth in the program. Hospital rooms were converted to one bedroom units, and youth had shared access to common areas, such as the kitchen and dining room. Each room came fully furnished with a bed, baby crib, and mini refrigerator.

Source: GAO photo and analysis of an interview with a private child welfare agency in California. | GAO-19-411

Examples of Single-Site and Scattered-Site Transitional Living Programs in Selected States

Single-site program: Officials from a single-site, all-male program in Tennessee described it as a family-like environment. Youth in the program live in cottages and house managers live in private quarters attached to the cottages. Program participants have their own bedrooms, and share bathrooms and common areas such as the kitchen. Youth over age 18 do not require 24-hour supervision, but have 24-hour access and daily interaction with the house managers. Youth typically receive an allowance of $150 per month (reduced to $100 if they are employed) to purchase personal items such as hygiene products.

Scattered-site program: Officials from a private agency in California explained that their agency holds master leases on one- and two-bedroom apartments across Los Angeles and Alameda counties for youth who have demonstrated their readiness for more independence. An education and employment specialist or youth advisor meets with youth living in these apartments once a week, but youth can access program staff via phone anytime and are encouraged to attend activities at the agency's main site. Youth receive a monthly stipend for personal expenses and their rent is paid by the program, but they are encouraged to work to manage additional living expenses. Those who stay in the program until they age out of foster care may remain in the apartment and take over the lease.

Source: GAO analysis of interviews with private child welfare agencies and discussion groups with youth in selected extended foster care states. | GAO-19-411

Officials and representatives of private agencies we spoke with in four of the selected states said that they have transitional living programs specifically for certain populations that need specialized support. For example, Illinois officials described programs in their state that specialize in serving youth with mental illnesses, youth who are developmentally delayed, pregnant or parenting youth, youth who are dually involved with child welfare and justice systems, and youth with problematic sexual behaviors, such as sexual offenders. (See sidebar.)

Private Residences

State and local officials we spoke with in the selected states said that youth who are ready to practice living more independently, in many instances with no on-site supervision, may live in private residences. Youth in these settings may choose where they would like to live, in comparison to youth in transitional living programs whose options may be limited to the apartments and facilities offered by the programs. Officials said that youth may live in apartments or private homes that are integrated in the community, and they are often responsible for signing their own lease or rental agreement.

According to officials in the selected states, the level of supervision provided to youth living in private residences varies, but is generally less than youth in transitional living programs.[30] Officials we spoke with in all five selected states confirmed that, at a minimum, case workers are expected to have monthly, in-person contact with youth.[31] These visits are typically to confirm if youth are still in their living arrangement, and to determine if youth are experiencing any challenges, such as limited access to resources in their community. However, officials said that some youth may receive more frequent case management and supervision, such as youth who have behavioral or mental health conditions. For example, officials at one private agency in Illinois told us their staff have weekly check-ins with youth who require legal assistance or have mental health needs. State and local officials in two states mentioned that in addition to monthly in-person contact, case workers typically have more frequent communication with youth via phone calls, texting, or video conferencing. If youth are located far away to attend college or pursue other opportunities, caseworkers may use these alternative modes of communication to maintain contact and provide support. For example, a case worker for a private agency in Illinois told us that she video chats with her client twice a week, and communicates via text messaging and email several times a week, to provide support for this college student living in a private residence while studying abroad.

Generally, states vary in the types of settings they allow for private residences, according to our survey results. Among the 26 extended-care states, the most common types of settings states reported offering include living in a shared apartment or home with a friend or roommate (25) or living in a private apartment or home (24). Most states reported that they also allow supervised independent living arrangements where a young person lives in a foster family home (20) (see text box).

[30]Supervision may be provided by a child welfare agency caseworker or from a private agency. For example, state child welfare agency officials we spoke with in one state said that they hold contracts with private child welfare agencies to operate programs in which youth live on their own and have their own rental agreements. The state receives case management support from those agencies.

[31]Title IV-B requires participating states to ensure that children in foster care receive caseworker visits at least monthly. 42 U.S.C. § 622(b)(17).

Living Arrangements with Current or Former Foster Parents

In response to our survey, most states reported that they allow youth in supervised independent living arrangements to live with a foster parent. Officials in two states mentioned that because these placements are considered supervised independent living settings, youth are eligible to receive a stipend directly from the child welfare agency for rent and living expenses. The youth and their foster parent(s) may establish a rental agreement so the youth can practice paying rent. In three states, officials also said that they provide foster families with information and resources to teach and demonstrate independent living skills, such as cooking and cleaning a home. State and local officials said this arrangement allows youth to remain connected to a supportive adult, while also learning to live independently. In our discussion groups with youth in extended care, one youth told us that living with a foster family can be a good choice when a youth has a good bond with the foster parents, and when the foster parents allow the youth to have more independence.

Source: GAO analysis of survey of state child welfare agencies in extended foster care states, interviews with state and local officials, and discussion groups with youth in selected extended foster care states. | GAO-19-411

Youth in private residences typically receive a stipend to pay for their rent and other costs, according to our survey results. States reported that stipend amounts ranged from $421.80 to $1,715 per month.[32] However, states reported having different expectations for youths' responsibilities in covering their living expenses. Officials in some states said they require youth to supplement their stipend with income from their employment to cover living expenses. Officials in other states said they may encourage youth to work because the stipend may not be enough to cover most of their housing and other costs. Officials in one county said that youth may receive up to $850 per month but that amount may be adjusted based on the income they earn while attending school. In another state, officials reported that youth are expected to pay at least $50 towards their rent and, depending on the young person's budget and financial obligations, the child welfare agency typically pays the difference directly to the landlord. One youth we spoke with in Illinois said that while working and going to school part-time, he built up his savings with help from the stipend that he received from the child welfare agency.

Other Supervised Independent Living Settings

States also reported allowing youth to live in a variety of other types of supervised independent living arrangements. According to our survey, other types of supervised independent living arrangements include college dorm rooms (22 states), Job Corps or employment training programs (21), single room occupancies (19), or mental health or

[32]According to our survey results, the average stipend amount is $870 per month.

substance use treatment facilities (15).[33] Officials we spoke with said that they continue to provide case management and supervision to youth in these placements, and may also support youth with a stipend to assist with living expenses. Additionally, they said that when colleges go on break during the winter or summer, case workers work with youth to find a temporary placement if needed to ensure there is no lapse in housing. Temporary placements may include living with former foster parents, friends, or renting their own apartment.

States Reported Allowing Youth Under 18 to Live in Supervised Independent Living Arrangements in Certain Instances and Providing Additional Supports

Supervised independent living settings are primarily intended for youth age 18 and older in extended care; however, some states also reported allowing these arrangements for youth under 18.[34] In response to our survey, 19 of 26 states reported allowing youth under age 18 to live in supervised independent living arrangements. State and local officials said that in instances when youth under 18 are placed in supervised independent living arrangements, they are generally placed in college dorms or transitional living programs.[35] In one state we visited, a transitional living program official said that the program accepts youth as young as 15 years old in a very few instances. (See table 3.)

[33]Job Corps is a residential, educational, and career and technical training program for low-income youth generally ages 16 through 24. Job Corps is administered by the Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration. According to ACF guidance, states may consider mental health, substance abuse, or other adult residential treatment facilities to be a supervised independent living placement if there is child welfare agency supervision and the youth is voluntarily enrolled in treatment.

[34]Title IV-E federal reimbursement is only available for supervised independent living arrangements for youth over age 18. Youth under age 18 generally must be placed in a licensed child care institution or foster family home that meets certain requirements to be eligible for federal reimbursement.

[35]ACF officials said that while youth under age 18 must be in a licensed child care institution or foster home to be eligible for federal reimbursement, it is possible that some states' transitional living programs serving youth under age 18 also meet the state licensing criteria for a child care institution. ACF officials said that although some states may consider transitional living programs to be a type of supervised independent living setting, youth under age 18 in such settings are not considered to be in supervised independent living for federal reporting purposes.

Table 3: Number of Youth in Supervised Independent Living Settings, as Reported by 19 Extended Foster Care States, State Fiscal Year 2017

State	Youth under 18	Youth 18 and older	Total number of youth in Supervised Independent Living Settings[a]
California	81	5138	5219
District of Columbia	1	46	47
Hawaii	0	177	177
Indiana	0	1519	1519
Maine	24	122	146
Maryland	24	442	466
Massachusetts	29	960	989
Michigan	43	454	497
Minnesota	1	394	395
New York	155	133	288
North Carolina	0	584	584
North Dakota	0	10	10
Ohio	106	281	387
Oregon	16	110	126
Pennsylvania	240	396	636
Tennessee	3	536	539
Washington	60	621	681
West Virginia	0	213	213
Wisconsin	10	120	130

Source: GAO analysis of survey of state child welfare agencies in extended-care states. | GAO-19-411

Note: Extended-care states are states (including the District of Columbia) that have been approved by the Department of Health and Human Services to extend foster care to youth ages 18 to 21 under title IV-E of the Social Security Act. The table excludes seven states that reported point in time data that did not reflect their entire state fiscal year 2017, or data that were not reliable for the purposes of our analysis. In addition, figure excludes states that were unable to provide data for both youth under 18 and youth 18 and older in supervised independent living settings during state fiscal year 2017. These states are Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Illinois, Nebraska, Texas, and Virginia. North Carolina and West Virginia indicated that they did not place any youth under age 18 in supervised independent living during state fiscal year 2017. Three states—Hawaii, Indiana, and North Dakota—responded “not applicable” when asked about the number of youth under 18 in supervised independent living placements, meaning that this option is not available in their state. Data may include youth who moved in or out of these placements at any point during states’ fiscal year 2017, or lived in these placements for only a portion of the fiscal year. In addition, data may include youth who were dually involved with child welfare and juvenile justice systems if the state’s child welfare agency had responsibility for these youth. Most states had a similar fiscal year calendar—July 1st to June 30th—with the exception of three states. The District of Columbia and Michigan’s fiscal year calendar began on October 1st and ended on September 30th. New York’s fiscal year began on April 1st and ended on March 31st.

[a]Supervised independent living generally refers to an alternative living arrangement, paid for or provided by the state child welfare agency, where the youth is living independently but receiving foster care services, such as financial support, case management, and services to help them become

a successful adult. A youth in supervised independent living may not have an on-site caregiver and is often provided with increased responsibilities, such as paying bills, assuming leases, and working with a landlord, according to Administration for Children and Families documentation. States may use different terms for supervised independent living settings, such as independent living, semi-independent living, supervised independent living program, and transitional living program. We asked states to provide data on the number of youth in these settings based on the manner in which these terms are used in their state, and treated these terms synonymously for the purposes of our survey.

Local officials and case workers said that they place youth under age 18 in supervised independent living settings on a case-by-case basis if their case worker determines that the young person is mature and capable enough to manage living with less supervision (see text box).

Youth Under Age 18 in Supervised Independent Living Arrangements

According to respondents to our survey, reasons youth under age 18 may be approved to live in supervised independent living arrangements include:

- youth is pregnant or parenting
- youth is pursing post-secondary education and wants to live in a dorm or with other college students
- youth is transgender and may want to live in an environment that supports their goals
- a family-based setting may not be conducive to the youth's needs due to past trauma and trust issues
- youth advocates for more independence and has demonstrated appropriate maturity and readiness
- placement is determined to be in the youth's best interest
- youth is 17 years old, meets all eligibility requirements, and no other placement options are available

Source: GAO analysis of survey of state child welfare agencies in extended foster care states and interviews with state and local officials. | GAO-19-411

In response to our survey, 17 states reported that when youth under age 18 are placed in supervised independent living settings, they generally receive additional supervision or supportive services compared to youth 18 and older. Two states reported that no additional supervision or supportive services are provided for youth under 18 in independent living arrangements beyond those provided to youth ages 18 to 21.[36] Officials we spoke with in three of the five selected states provided examples of the additional supports they offer to younger youth in these settings.

[36]States reported this information in response to an open-ended survey question. Seven states did not provide a response to this question.

- Officials at one private agency in Tennessee told us that if youth under 18 in their transitional living program are unable to ride the bus to high school, program staff will transport them to school.
- State officials in California said that generally, youth under 18 living in transitional living programs receive more hands-on support. Officials at one private agency in California said the supports provided to youth under 18 in their transitional living program include 24 hour access to on-site program staff and weekly meetings with their case manager.
- Officials in Maryland told us youth under 18 living on their own receive additional case management support to evaluate how the youth is adjusting to living on their own, and to provide additional guidance on budgeting and household management.

While many states allow youth under age 18 to live in supervised independent living settings in certain circumstances, over half of all extended-care states (15 of 26) reported that the typical age that youth enter this placement type is 18. Officials in three of the selected states said that even when the state allows it, these arrangements are not often used for youth under 18. Additionally, officials we spoke with reported that highly independent settings, such as their own apartment, are typically reserved for youth age 18 or older.

States Reported Considering Youths' Readiness for Supervised Independent Living, but Officials Noted that Housing Availability can Affect Placements

Most states we surveyed reported considering youths' readiness, such as life skills, education, and employment status, when placing youth in supervised independent living arrangements. Officials we spoke with in four of the five selected states similarly noted that supervised independent living is most appropriate for youth who have demonstrated their readiness. These officials also noted that they consider the availability of housing options, including for youth with complex needs, which can affect youths' placement in supervised independent living arrangements.

Life skills. In response to our survey, most states reported considering youths' life skills when placing youth in supervised independent living. Specifically, 19 states reported requiring or recommending that youth participate in an assessment to gauge their mastery of certain life skills, such as the ability to budget finances or schedule medical appointments. For example, state officials in California said they developed an assessment form with questions such as whether youth understand the risks associated with using credit cards, can shop for food and prepare meals, and know how to do laundry. Caseworkers in one California county said that they consider youths' ability to manage their living costs and their rental responsibilities prior to approving a supervised independent living placement.

Education and employment. Most states also reported considering education and employment when placing youth in supervised independent living. Specifically, 16 states reported requiring or recommending that youth have a high school diploma or General Education Development certificate, or be enrolled in secondary or post-secondary school, in order to be placed in supervised independent living. Additionally, 17 states reported requiring or recommending that youth be employed or enrolled in a job training program. For example, in Illinois, youth who want to live in private residences must have a job for at least 45 days prior to being referred for placement, and continue working for at least 15 hours per week while in the private residence.

Five states reported considering other indicators of readiness beyond life skills, education, and employment when placing youth in supervised independent living settings. For example, the District of Columbia reported requiring that youth (1) have no pending or unresolved criminal proceedings at the time they apply for supervised independent living, and (2) have a checking account with a minimum balance of $100 and actively participate in the child welfare agency's financial literacy program.

Availability of housing options, including for youth with complex needs. State and local officials in two of the five selected states said that they may place youth in private residences as a default or short-term option when no other living arrangements are available for youth age 18 or older. For example, officials in Tennessee said that transitional living programs and other housing options for youth outside of metropolitan areas are more limited. To ensure that youth in these areas do not experience homelessness, the officials said they may rely on other living arrangements, such as providing youth with stipends to live in private residences. Additionally, officials in New York and California said in certain localities, there may be constraints offering certain supervised independent living settings due to a lack of affordable housing. For example, officials in one San Francisco area county said some youth who want to live independently choose to move to a different part of the state, or even out of state, because their stipend for a private residence is insufficient to afford an apartment there. Officials in all selected states also said that there are shortages of foster parents willing to provide care for youth ages 18 to 21, which can generally affect their options for living arrangements.[37]

State and local officials from all five selected states also cited challenges finding housing options that are equipped to serve certain subpopulations of youth with complex needs, such as youth with acute mental health needs, youth that are also involved in the juvenile justice system, and pregnant and parenting youth. For example, local and private agency officials said state child welfare agencies may require parenting youth in supervised independent living settings to be in larger apartments, which may be too costly to afford. In addition, officials in four selected states said private agencies may be less likely to accept youth with acute mental health conditions or youth involved in the juvenile justice system if the agencies do not have the resources to address their needs.[38]

In addition to these considerations, officials we spoke with in all five selected states and other stakeholders said they consider the importance of giving youth in extended care greater involvement in decision making as they become adults. Local officials in California said they believe in allowing youth to take risks and experience the challenges of living independently while they have support from the child welfare system. Similarly, local officials in Tennessee said that giving youth choices in their living arrangements and considering their needs and goals is important for keeping them engaged in extended care.

[37]GAO previously reported on challenges related to shortages of foster families, including difficulties recruiting and retaining foster families and finding foster families who can meet the needs of some youth in foster care, such as those with behavioral problems. See GAO, *Foster Care: HHS Could Do More to Support States' Efforts to Keep Children in Family-Based Care,* GAO-16-85 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 9, 2015) and *Foster Care: Additional Actions Could Help HHS Better Support States' Use of Private Providers to Recruit and Retain Foster Families,* GAO-18-376 (Washington, D.C.: May 30, 2018).

[38]GAO has previously reported on challenges that child welfare agencies face securing needed services for youth in foster care, including assistance with material needs, such as housing, and mental health services. See GAO, *Child Welfare: States Use Flexible Funds, but Struggle to Meet Service Need,* GAO-13-170 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 30, 2013).

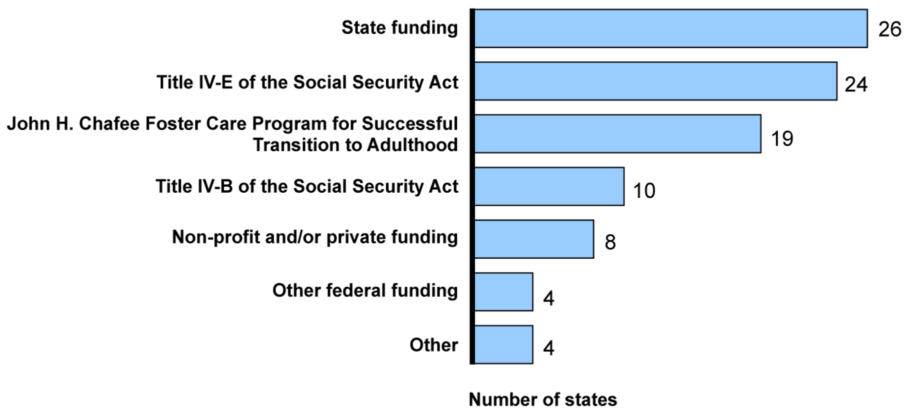
Most States Reported Using Title IV-E Funding for Supervised Independent Living Arrangements but Several had Low Title IV-E Eligibility Rates for Youth in Extended Care

Most (24 of 26) extended-care states we surveyed reported using title IV-E funds to support youth in supervised independent living arrangements. Most (19 of 26) states also reported using Chafee Program funds, which primarily support independent living services, to fund supervised independent living arrangements. For example, state officials in Tennessee said that in certain situations when youth need to secure an apartment quickly, officials may use Chafee Program funds to help with the deposit. Officials in Illinois told us that they also use some Chafee Program funds for room and board, particularly for youth who are not title IV-E eligible.[39]

In addition to title IV-E and Chafee Program funds, most states reported using a combination of sources, including other federal funds such as those available under title IV-B of the Social Security Act, as well as state and local funds, to pay for supervised independent living arrangements. All states reported using state funds for supervised independent living (see fig. 3).

[39]States have some flexibility in how they spend Chafee Program funds, and supported services may include help with housing, and room and board financial assistance, among other areas. For example, up to 30 percent of a state's Chafee Program allotment may be used for room and board costs for certain eligible youth age 18 or older.

Figure 3: Funding Sources 26 States with Extended Foster Care Reported Using for Supervised Independent Living



Source: GAO analysis of survey of state child welfare agencies in extended-care states. | GAO-19-411

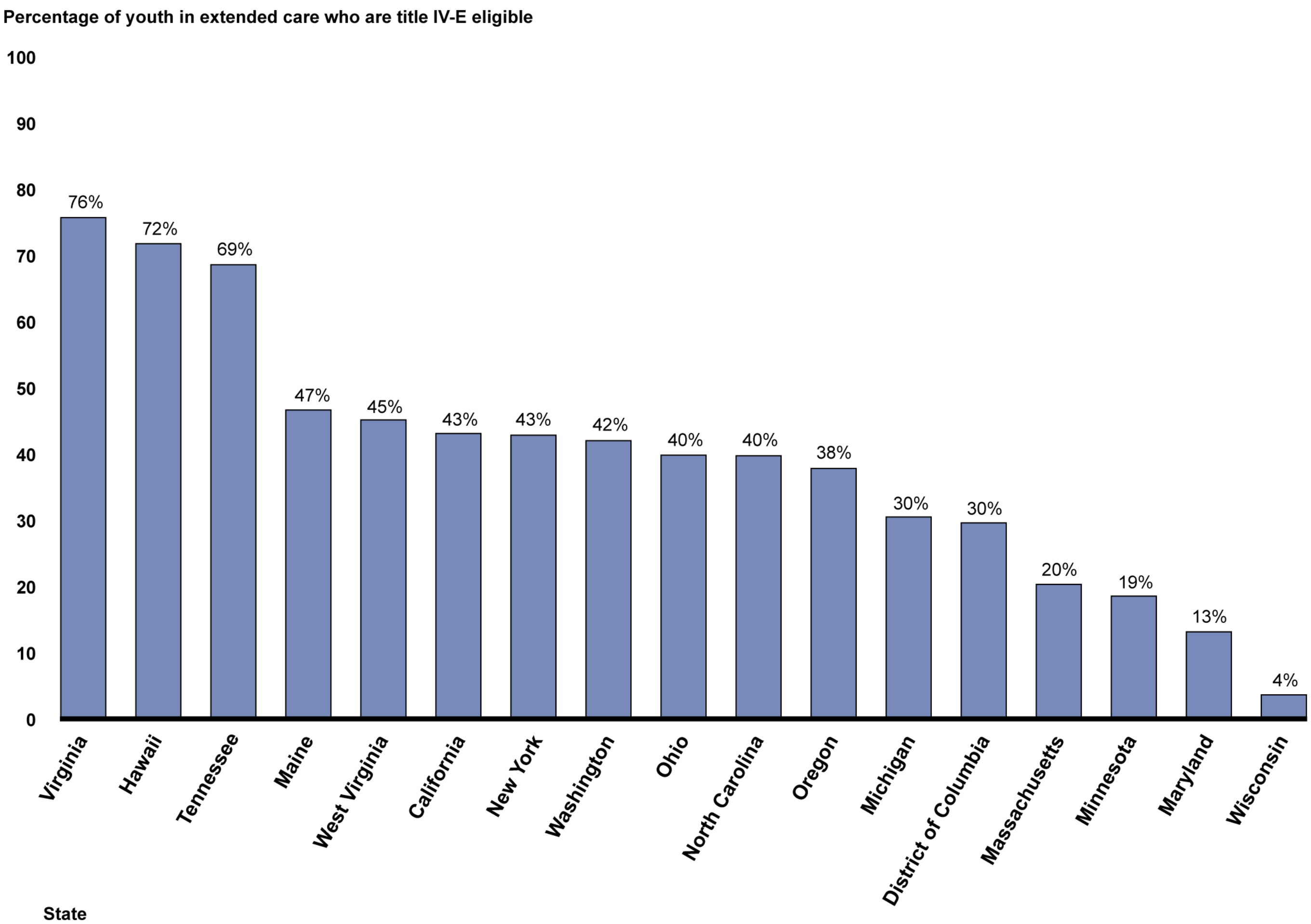
Note: Extended-care states are states (including the District of Columbia) that have been approved by the Department of Health and Human Services to extend foster care to youth ages 18 to 21, under title IV-E of the Social Security Act. Title IV-E of the Social Security Act authorizes federal funding to state child welfare agencies to help cover the costs of operating their foster care programs. Title IV-B of the Social Security Act provides grants to states for programs directed toward several goals, including protecting and promoting the welfare of children and preventing child maltreatment. The John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood provides funding to states, under title IV-E, for support services that are intended to assist youth in the transition to adulthood.

Although most states reported using title IV-E funds to support supervised independent arrangements, in several states, few youth in extended care (regardless of their living arrangement) were eligible for title IV-E funding.[40] In 14 of the 17 extended-care states for which we calculated eligibility rates, we found that the majority of youth ages 18 to 21 in care were not eligible for title IV-E reimbursement in state fiscal year 2017, meaning that the state was responsible for most or all of the cost of their

[40]For states that offered state-funded foster care for youth ages 18 to 21 prior to the Fostering Connections Act, once their extended care programs became eligible for title IV-E, the availability of these federal funds may have enabled some states to modify or expand their extended care programs. For example, state officials in Maryland told us that in response to the Fostering Connections Act, the state allowed youth to re-enter foster care if they previously chose to leave care on or after their 18th birthday. Officials said that prior to that change, a youth in Maryland who voluntarily exited foster care after turning 18 could not re-enter.

care.[41] We found that six of the states had title IV-E eligibility rates of 30 percent or lower. Two states, Virginia and Hawaii, had eligibility rates of over 70 percent (see fig. 4).

Figure 4: Title IV-E Eligibility Rates for Youth Ages 18 to 21 in Extended Foster Care in 17 Extended-Care States, State Fiscal Year 2017



Source: GAO analysis of survey of state child welfare agencies in extended-care states. | GAO-19-411

[41]We calculated eligibility rates based on state-reported data on the number of youth in extended care and the number of youth in extended care who were eligible for title IV-E reimbursement in their state's fiscal year 2017. In nine of the 26 states we surveyed, we were unable to determine the title IV-E eligibility rate because they did not have available or reliable data on one or both of these subgroups.

Note: Extended-care states are states (including the District of Columbia) that have been approved by the Department of Health and Human Services to extend foster care to youth ages18 to 21, under title IV-E of the Social Security Act (title IV-E). Title IV-E authorizes federal funding to state child welfare agencies to help cover the costs of operating their foster care programs. This figure shows the percentage of youth in extended care for whom states receive partial federal reimbursement under title IV-E (referred to in this figure as title IV-E eligible). We calculated title IV-E eligibility rates based on state-reported data on the number of youth in extended care and the number of youth in extended care who were eligible for title IV-E reimbursement in their state's fiscal year 2017. Of the 26 states we surveyed, we were unable to determine the title IV-E eligibility rate for nine states because they did not have available or reliable data on one or both of these subgroups. Therefore, the states are not included in the figure.

State officials we spoke with in three of the five selected states said that ineligibility frequently stems from family income exceeding the income limit for title IV-E funding. Specifically, title IV-E is limited to youth removed from homes that would have qualified for cash assistance under the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program as of July 16, 1996. To receive title IV-E funding, youth must have met eligibility requirements at the time they were initially removed from their home, or at the time of their voluntary placement agreement. ACF has reported that fewer families meet the AFDC income standards over time, thereby reducing the number of all youth who are eligible for title IV-E funding, regardless of their age.[42] In 2018, we reported on declining title IV-E eligibility rates for the entire population of youth in foster care.[43]

Officials we spoke with in Illinois and Tennessee said they reconsider a youth's title IV-E eligibility once the youth turns 18, using the youth's income at that point in time.[44] Officials from these two states told us they close the original foster care case when a young person turns 18 and then reopen the case when the young person re-enters extended care. Using this approach, officials said they can base the title IV-E eligibility determination on the youth's income at the time of re-entry into the foster care system, rather than the income of the home from which the youth was removed upon initially entering foster care. Illinois officials said this process helped increase the eligibility of their extended-care population

[42]Administration for Children and Families, 2018 Justification of Estimations for Appropriations Committees.

[43]GAO-18-376. The percentage of children eligible for title IV-E foster care funds decreased from about 54 percent in fiscal year 1996 to about 39 percent in fiscal year 2015, according to data published by the Congressional Research Service.

[44]Tennessee officials said they do not use this process for youth who were already eligible for title IV-E funds before their 18th birthday.

by more than 30 percent since 2012.[45] Officials we spoke with in the remaining three selected states said they do not use this approach.

ACF officials said that states can choose to close and re-open cases for youth in extended care, which would allow new eligibility determinations based on a youth's income. However, ACF officials said they do not monitor states' choices in this area, or how states' choices affect their title IV-E eligibility rate. Officials said they focus on helping states identify options and provide examples in ACF program instructions so states can determine what works best with their own policies and procedures.[46]

Four states (Arkansas, Indiana, Maryland, and Massachusetts) reported in our survey not claiming title IV-E reimbursements for any youth in extended care in state fiscal year 2017.[47] Officials in two states, Indiana and Maryland, reported not claiming title IV-E funds for youth in extended care at least in part because they use a title IV-E waiver.[48] However, according to ACF, states can claim title IV-E reimbursements for youth over 18 in addition to their waiver funds, so these two states may be able to claim additional title IV-E funds for their extended care population. State officials in Arkansas told us they have not yet established the proper procedures, internal controls, and monitoring mechanisms to allow them to claim title IV-E funds for youth in extended care. Officials said they do not have systems to track when youth may have lost their jobs or

[45]We were not able to report Illinois's title IV-E eligibility rate for its state fiscal year 2017 due to the format in which its data were submitted on our survey. However, we were able to determine that at a point in time during the fiscal year (June 30, 2017), Illinois's eligibility rate for youth in extended care was approximately 61 percent, based on the state's reported data for that date.

[46]ACF Program Instruction. ACYF-CB-PI-10-11 (July 9, 2010).

[47]As previously discussed, 24 of 26 states reported in our survey using title IV-E funds to support supervised independent living arrangements. However, two states that reported using title IV-E funds for supervised independent living—Maryland and Massachusetts—also reported that they did not claim title IV-E reimbursements for youth ages 18 to 21 in their state fiscal year 2017.

[48]As previously discussed, according to HHS officials, most waiver states use a capped allocation of funds based on their historical title IV-E expenditure trends, which would not include youth over age 18 because states' waiver allocations were based on expenditure trends before implementation of title IV-E extended foster care. Currently, all state title IV-E waivers are set to expire by Sept. 30, 2019.

dropped out of school, which could affect the youth's eligibility for extended care.[49]

Selected States Reported Offering a Range of Training and Other Supports to Prepare Youth in Extended Care to Live Independently

Youth in Extended Care May Receive Targeted Assistance in Selected States, As Well As Training and Other Supports Offered to All Older Youth in Care

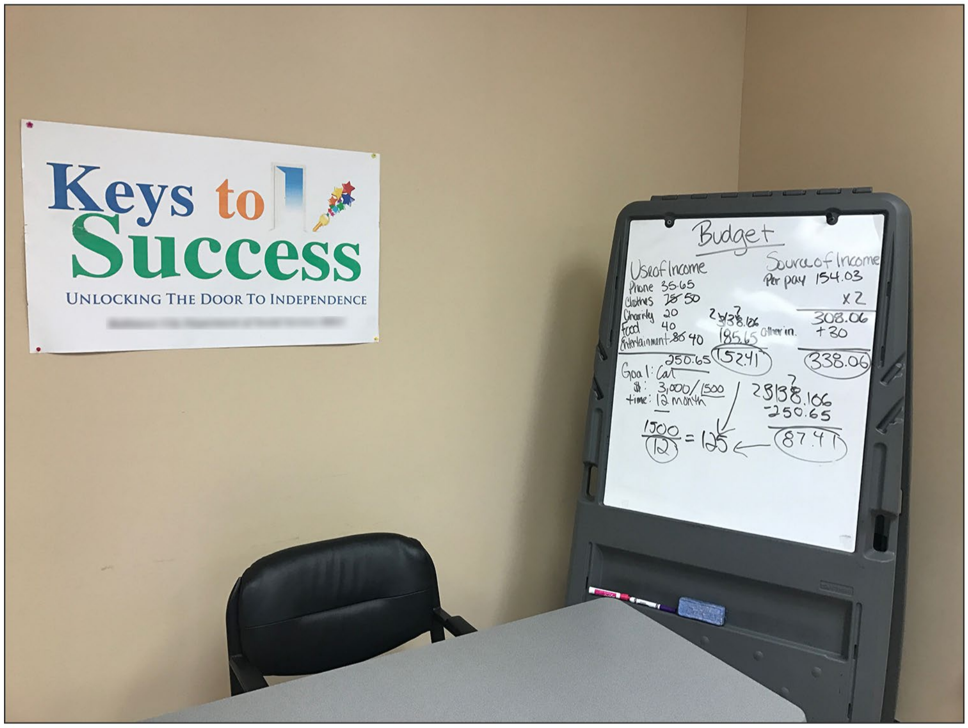
To help youth develop independent living skills and successfully transition out of care, state and local officials in four of the five selected states reported offering targeted training and support for youth ages 18 to 21.[50] For example:

- Officials in one Maryland county said they offer youth nearing age 21 a 3-week intensive training focused on employment and housing called "Keys to Success." According to officials, Keys to Success offers experiential learning through cooking demonstrations, budgeting and financial literacy training, group trips to stores to look at furniture or interview-appropriate clothing, and housing fairs. (See fig. 5.)

[49]As previously discussed, states that extend care may seek title IV-E reimbursement only if the youth meets at least one of the following criteria: (1) is completing high school or a program leading to an equivalent credential; (2) is enrolled in an institution that provides postsecondary or vocational education; (3) is participating in a program or activity designed to promote, or remove barriers to, employment; (4) is employed at least 80 hours per month; or (5) is incapable of doing any of the activities described above due to a medical condition. States may choose to use all or some of these criteria.

[50]In certain instances, programming for youth ages 18 to 21 may also be offered to youth in foster care who chose not to enroll in extended care, or who left and returned to extended care.

Figure 5: Keys to Success Classroom Lesson on Budgeting for Youth in Extended Foster Care Transitioning to Adulthood



Source: GAO. | GAO-19-411

- Officials from Youth Villages, a national nonprofit organization, said they offer the organization's intensive YVLifeSet program to youth in extended care in Tennessee.[51] The program generally lasts six to nine months and pairs youth with a specialist to meet with weekly to help them achieve their goals for independent adulthood. For example, to help youth maintain employment, officials said specialists can help youth build skills such as how to handle conflict with

[51]Youth Villages provides mental and behavioral health services to youth across the country. According to Youth Villages officials, through direct services and partnerships, the organization's YVLifeSet program provides intensive clinical and comprehensive assistance to young adults in foster care or those who have exited the foster care system, ages 17 to 22. Participating youth are assigned a specialist who works with them in weekly in-person sessions to help navigate issues around education, employment, housing, mental health, and personal relationships. Officials said that. YVLifeSet currently operates in or is expanding to Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Los Angeles County, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New York City, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Washington, and the District of Columbia.

supervisors or coworkers, provide customer service, and understand job expectations, among others.

- In Illinois, the state's "Countdown to 21" program is intended to encourage youth to plan for long-term education and vocational goals, and promote their financial stability through financial literacy training. All youth, at age 19, are referred to the financial literacy training, which covers topics such as credit and investing, and officials said most youth complete the training prior to exiting extended care.
- Officials in one California county said they offer youth ages 18 to 21 an annual public transportation pass through the Youth on the Move program, to ensure they can get to work or school.

According to ACF, some extended care states also have a specialized case management system for youth over 18. For example, officials from one county in Maryland told us that all youth in foster care are automatically enrolled in a supervised independent living case management track when they turn 18. This case management system is intended to identify a youth's areas of need and design a plan to prepare them for living independently, regardless of their current living arrangement.

Youth in extended care can also participate in independent living services that are offered more broadly to all older youth in foster care.[52] Officials in all five selected states reported offering services that support youth in extended care in their housing, education, financial literacy, and employment goals, as well as offering health education, mentoring, and training on daily living skills (e.g., grocery shopping and budgeting).[53] Examples of types of services the selected states reported offering to all older youth include:

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[52]Under the Chafee Program, states can offer services to youth who have experienced foster care at age 14 or older, in addition to youth who were formerly in foster care and are ages 18 to 21 (up to age 23 in some cases), as well as youth who exited foster care to adoption or kinship guardianship after age 16.

[53]For more information on the types of services states offer, see ACF's Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) December 2017 report on independent living programs for youth in care transitioning to adulthood. The report summarized current research on the characteristics, needs, and outcomes of youth aging out of foster care, established a typology of program models, and proposed a framework for future research on independent living programs. Department of Health and Human Services, Mark E. Courtney et al., *Planning a Next-Generation Evaluation Agenda for the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program,* Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families (Washington, D.C.: 2017).

- **Housing.** Officials from Youth Villages described how their organization assists youth in Tennessee to learn to find and maintain stable housing. For example, Youth Villages specialists work with youth to search for affordable housing options, develop a housing budget, complete applications, and address background check issues. Specialists also help youth build and maintain relationships with roommates and landlords.
- **Education.** County officials in New York described how a local community college helps youth complete financial aid forms, and conducts college day simulations and resume-building workshops.
- **Financial literacy.** County officials in Maryland told us they offer classroom instruction on financial literacy which includes how to understand financial aid, good banking practices, and how to asses loans and grants.
- **Employment.** In California, county officials told us about several programs they offer to help youth meet their employment goals, such as a youth worker program in which 16- to 21-year-olds are hired to rotate through different county departments for 18 months.
- **Health.** County officials in Maryland told us they offer yoga classes and other stress reduction techniques, as well as outings to local clinics for youth to learn about family planning resources.
- **Mentoring.** County officials in California told us they host weekly social events to establish community connections between youth in care, and youth have regular meetings with supportive adults focused on building connections with family and friends.
- **Daily living.** Officials at a private agency in Illinois told us the youth in their housing programs have a set schedule to participate in different life skills activities, such as cooking, doing laundry, and other chores.

Although officials in all five selected states said they offer a variety of training and supports to help youth in extended care develop independent living skills, officials in these states also said that youth may experience challenges using these skills. For example, officials said youth in private residences may have difficulty covering their living expenses, which can lead to evictions. A New York county official said some youth living on their own may struggle with the lack of structure and the amount of independence in making their own decisions and setting their schedule. For these youth, officials said the child welfare agency will increase the level of case management, and offer additional support or services.

Selected States Reported Directing Youth in Extended Care to Services Based on Their Needs and Encouraging Participation with Financial Incentives

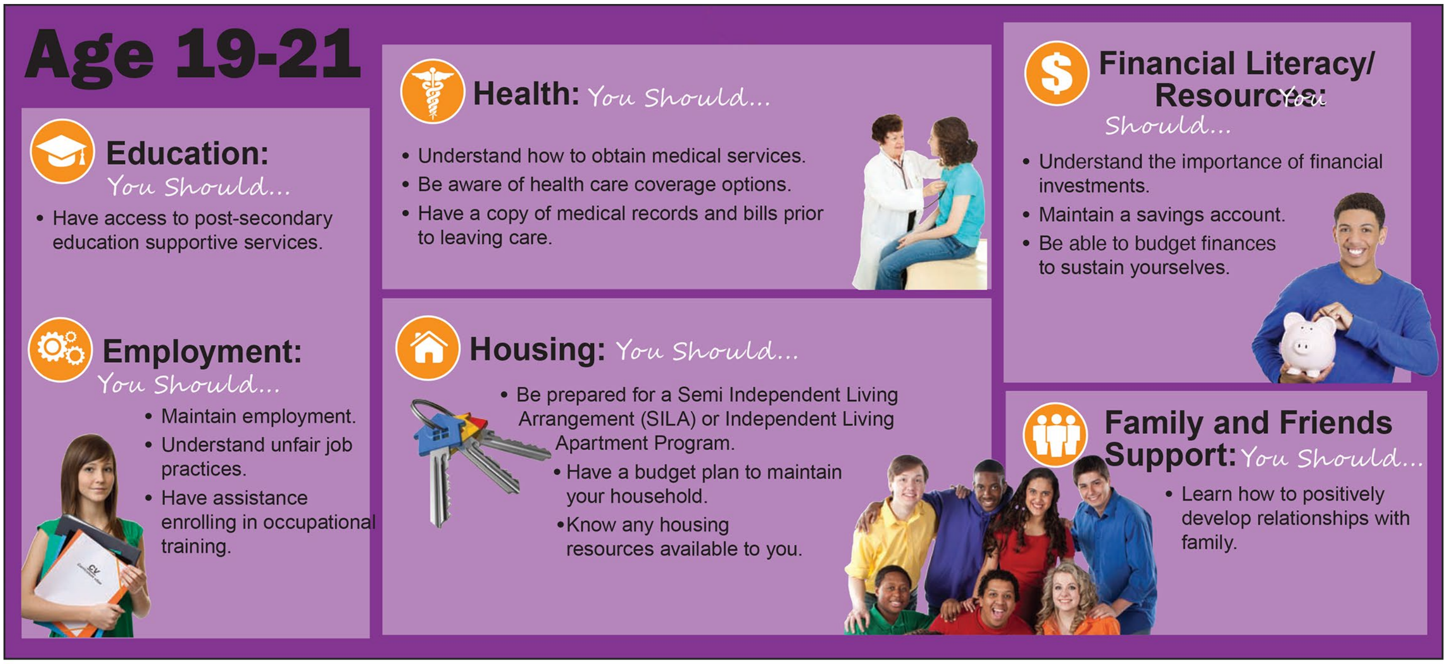
To best support the development of independent living skills in youth in extended care, officials we spoke with in all five selected states said they use assessments such as the Casey Life Skills assessment, transition planning, or regular check-ins to determine youth goals, direct youth to services to meet their needs, and to measure their progress.[54]

For example:

- A county official in New York described how private child welfare agencies use the Casey Life Skills assessment every 6 months for youth in care to target services to areas in which the youth needs to build skills.
- Through its Ready by 21 program, Maryland has yearly independent living benchmarks for youth, starting at age 14. Officials we spoke with said that caseworkers can use these benchmarks to assess a youth's progress towards living independently, create an individual service plan based on their progress, and direct youth to additional resources as needed (see fig. 6).

[54]The Casey Life Skills Assessment is a tool that assesses the behaviors and competencies youth need to achieve their long-term goals. Examples of the life skills it helps evaluate include maintaining healthy relationships, work and study habits, planning and goal-setting, budgeting and paying bills, and establishing permanent connections to caring adults.

Figure 6: Excerpt from Maryland's Ready by 21 Benchmarks for Youth in Foster Care Transitioning to Adulthood



Source: Maryland Department of Human Services. Retrieved from http://mdconnectmylife.org/initiatives/ready-by-21/. | GAO-19-411

In addition, title IV-E requires that caseworkers assist youth with developing a transition planning document.[55] According to state and local officials, youth periodically meet with their caseworkers to discuss their progress on their goals, and caseworkers may provide additional guidance and support as needed during these meetings. For example, a caseworker in Tennessee described providing youth funds for driver's education classes and licenses, prom expenses, and extracurricular activities, based on conversations with youth about their needs.

Officials we spoke with in all five states also discussed providing financial incentives to encourage youth to participate in independent living

[55]Title IV-E, as amended by the Fostering Connections Act, requires that during the 90-day period prior to a child in foster care attaining age 18 (or, up to 21 years of age, as the state may elect), a caseworker assists and supports the child in developing a transition plan that is personalized at the direction of the child, and includes specific options on housing, health insurance education, local opportunities for mentors and continuing support services, work force supports, and employment services. A subsequent amendment also requires that the plan include certain information about designating a health care proxy or power of attorney. 42 U.S.C. § 675(5)(H).

services. For example, according to officials in Illinois, if youth complete the financial literacy course offered by the state child welfare agency, they receive $1,200 when they exit care. County officials in Maryland described participating in the Jim Casey Opportunity Passport program. In this program, officials said, youth who complete financial literacy training are eligible for a matched savings program of up to $3,000 to purchase an asset, such as a car.[56] In our discussion groups with youth in extended care, youth told us that they are responsible for taking the initiative to participate in services, but financial incentives are helpful. Youth told us that as a result of these incentives, as well as other supportive savings programs, some are able to exit care with substantial savings.

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to HHS for review and comment. In response, HHS provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate, but did not provide general comments on the draft report.

As agreed with your offices, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution until 30 days from its issue date. At that time, we will send copies of this report to interested congressional committees and to the Department of Health and Human Services. In addition, the report will be available at no charge on the GAO website at http://www.gao.gov.

[56]The Jim Casey Opportunity Passport is part of the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, which is available in 17 states and supports programming and research for young adults transitioning out of foster care. The Initiative is sponsored through the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a private charitable organization which makes grants to federal, state, and local agencies to support vulnerable youth.

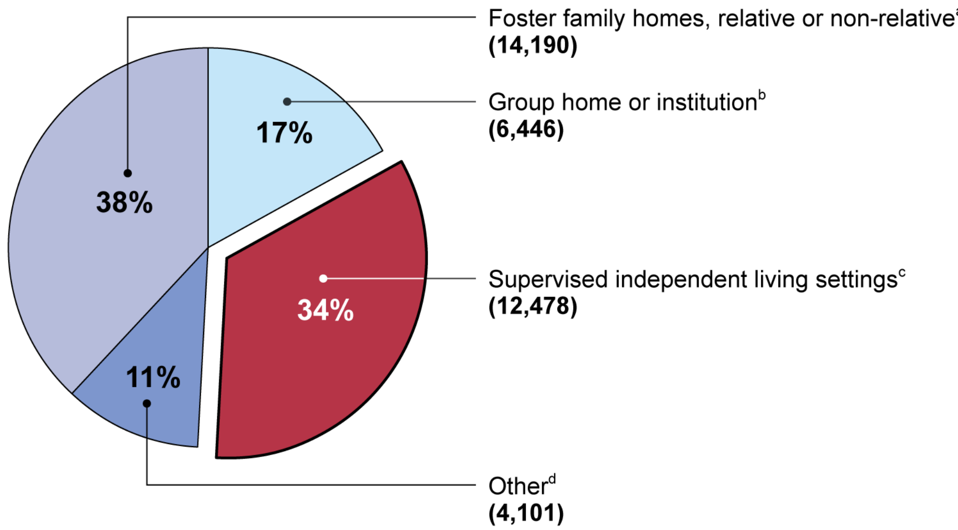
If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-7215 or larink@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix II.

Kathryn A. Larin, Director
Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues

Appendix I: Youth in Extended Foster Care by Placement Type

Figure 7 below presents the total number and percentage of youth in extended care by living arrangement (referred to as placement type) during states' fiscal year 2017. Table 4 and Figure 8 present the number and percentage of youth in extended care by state and placement type during each state's fiscal year 2017, respectively. Placement types include foster family homes with relatives or non-relatives, group homes or institutions, supervised independent living arrangements, and other types of arrangements. Figure 7, Table 4, and Figure 8 present information for 21 extended-care states. We excluded five of the 26 extended-care states we surveyed because they reported point in time data that did not reflect their entire state fiscal year 2017, or they reported data that were not reliable for the purposes of our analysis.

Figure 7: Number and Percentage of Youth Ages 18 to 21 in Extended Foster Care in 21 States, by Placement Type, State Fiscal Year 2017



Source: GAO analysis of survey of state child welfare agencies in extended-care states. | GAO-19-411

Note: Extended-care states are states (including the District of Columbia) that have been approved by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to extend foster care to youth ages 18 to 21 under title IV-E of the Social Security Act. Figure excludes five states that reported point in time data that did not reflect their entire state fiscal year 2017, or that reported data that were not reliable for the purposes of our analysis. These states are Arkansas, Connecticut, Illinois, Nebraska, and Texas. Data may include youth who moved in or out of these placements at any point during states' fiscal year 2017, or lived in these placements for only a portion of the fiscal year. In addition, data may include youth who were dually involved with child welfare and juvenile justice systems, if the state's child welfare agency had responsibility for these youth. Most states had a similar fiscal year calendar—July 1st to June 30th—with the exception of four states. Alabama, the District of Columbia, and Michigan's fiscal year began on October 1st and ended on September 30th. New York's fiscal year began April 1st and ended March 31st.

[a]Foster family homes, relative or non-relative, can refer to placements in which youth lived with a licensed or unlicensed foster parent that the state considered a foster care living arrangement. This

generally excludes youth in supervised independent living settings with former or current foster parents.

[b]Group home can refer to licensed or approved homes or facilities that provide 24-hour care for youth in a group setting that generally has seven to 12 children. Institutions can refer to child care facilities operated by agencies that provide 24-hour care and/or treatment for youth who require separation from their own homes and group living experience. These facilities may include child care institutions, residential treatment facilities, maternity homes, etc. This generally excludes youth in supervised independent living settings that may be also licensed as group homes or institutions, such as youth who voluntarily enroll in treatment facilities.

[c]Supervised independent living generally refers to an alternative living arrangement, paid for or provided by the state child welfare agency, where the youth is living independently but receiving foster care services, such as financial support, case management, and services to help them become a successful adult. A youth in supervised independent living may not have an onsite caregiver and is often provided with increased responsibilities, such as paying bills, assuming leases, and working with a landlord, according to Administration for Children and Families documentation. Terms and definitions used in our survey may have varied slightly from the ones states use. States may use different terms for supervised independent living settings, such as independent living, semi-independent living, supervised independent living arrangement, supervised independent living program, and transitional living program. We asked states to provide data on the number of youth in these settings based on the manner in which these terms are used in their state, and treated these terms synonymously for the purposes of our survey.

[d]Other settings states reported included adoptive homes, hospitals, placements with biological parents and trial reunifications, and detention facilities. In addition, other includes youth who were not in an approved child welfare placement, such as youth who ran away or were absent without legal permission. In some instances, this category may include placements in college dormitories, Job Corps, or other employment training programs in states where these placements are not considered supervised independent living settings.

Table 4: Number of Youth Ages 18 to 21 in Extended Foster Care in 21 States, by Placement Type, State Fiscal Year 2017

State	Foster family homes, relative or non-relative[a]	Group home or institution[b]	Supervised independent living setting[c]	Other[d]	Total number of youth ages 18-21 in extended care
Alabama	257	121	13	145	536
California	2060	460	5138	0	7658
District of Columbia	138	29	46	52	265
Hawaii	0	0	177	0	177
Indiana	4060	1759	1519	2029	9367
Massachusetts	292	473	960	353	2078
Maryland	525	368	442	256	1591
Maine	28	14	122	14	178
Michigan	1135	268	454	62	1919
Minnesota	380	289	394	0	1063
North Carolina	0	0	584	0	584
North Dakota	31	4	10	0	45
New York	1540	440	133	245	2358
Ohio	758	720	281	9	1768
Oregon	621	93	110	67	891

State	Foster family homes, relative or non-relative[a]	Group home or institution[b]	Supervised independent living setting[c]	Other[d]	Total number of youth ages 18-21 in extended care
Pennsylvania	803	655	396	192	2046
Tennessee	137	199	536	162	1034
Virginia	112	0	209	0	321
Washington	272	73	621	55	1021
West Virginia	210	191	213	24	638
Wisconsin	831	290	120	434	1675

Source: GAO analysis of survey of state child welfare agencies in extended-care states. | GAO-19-411

Note: Extended-care states are states (including the District of Columbia) that have been approved by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to extend foster care to youth ages 18 to 21 under title IV-E of the Social Security Act. Table excludes five states that reported point in time data that did not reflect their entire state fiscal year 2017, or data that were not reliable for the purposes of our analysis. These states are Arkansas, Connecticut, Illinois, Nebraska, and Texas. Data may include youth who moved in or out of these placements at any point during states' fiscal year 2017, or lived in these placements for only a portion of the fiscal year. In addition, data may include youth who were dually involved with child welfare and juvenile justice systems, if the state's child welfare agency had responsibility for these youth. Most states had a similar fiscal year calendar—July 1st to June 30th—with the exception of four states. Alabama, the District of Columbia, and Michigan's fiscal year began on October 1st and ended on September 30th. New York's fiscal year began April 1st and ended March 31st.

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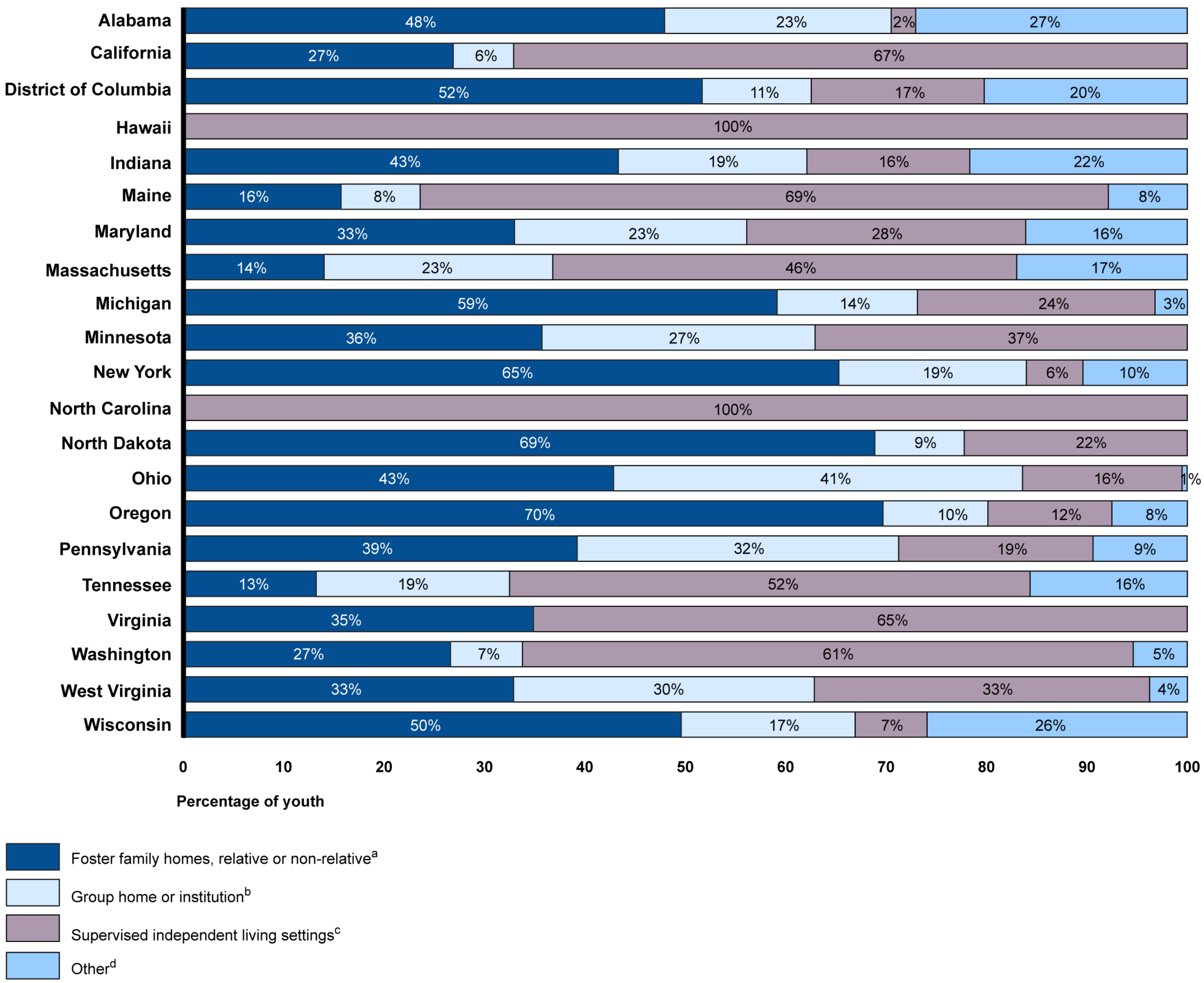
[d]Other settings states reported included adoptive homes, hospitals, placements with biological parents and trial reunifications, and detention facilities. In addition, other includes youth who were not in an approved child welfare placement, such as youth who ran away or were absent without legal permission. In some instances, this category may include placements in college dormitories, Job Corps, or other employment training programs in states where these placements are not considered supervised independent living settings.

Figure 8: Percentage of Youth Ages 18 to 21 in Extended Foster Care in 21 States, by Placement Type, State Fiscal Year 2017



Source: GAO analysis of survey of state child welfare agencies in extended-care states. | GAO-19-411

Note: Extended-care states are states (including the District of Columbia) that have been approved by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to extend foster care to youth ages 18 to 21 under title IV-E of the Social Security Act. Figure excludes five states that reported point in time data that did not reflect their entire state fiscal year 2017, or data that were not reliable for the purposes of our analysis. These states are Arkansas, Connecticut, Illinois, Nebraska, and Texas. Data may include youth who moved in or out of these placements at any point during states' fiscal year 2017, or lived in these placements for only a portion of the fiscal year. In addition, data may include youth who were dually involved with child welfare and juvenile justice systems, if the state's child welfare agency had responsibility for these youth. Most states had a similar fiscal year calendar—July 1st to June 30th—with the exception of four states. Alabama, the District of Columbia, and Michigan's fiscal year began on October 1st and ended on September 30th. New York's fiscal year began April 1st and ended March 31st.

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To develop Figure 7, Table 4, and Figure 8, we assessed the information we collected in our survey of extended-care states on youth ages 18 to 21 for whom the state child welfare agency had responsibility for placement, care, or supervision during states' fiscal year 2017. We administered the survey to state child welfare agencies in the 26 states approved by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to offer federally funded extended care as of February 2018.[1] The survey was conducted between August and October 2018 and we obtained a 100 percent response rate. Specifically, we asked states to provide data on the number of these youth in care by placement type. In addition, we asked states to provide data on the number of youth under age 18 that were placed in supervised independent living or other independent living arrangements.

[1]"Federally funded" refers to partial federal reimbursement of state foster care costs under title IV-E of the Social Security Act.

To ensure the quality and reliability of the survey, we pretested the questionnaire with three extended-care states to check (1) the clarity and flow of the questions, (2) the appropriateness of the terminology used, (3) if the information could be easily obtained and whether there were concerns about the reliability of data that would be collected, and (4) if the survey was comprehensive and unbiased. We revised the questionnaire based on the pretests. We reviewed responses to assess if they were consistent and contained all relevant information, and followed up as necessary to determine that states' responses were complete, reasonable, and sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report; we excluded data where we had concerns about their reliability.

Appendix II: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Kathryn A. Larin, Director, (202) 512-7215 or larink@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Sara Schibanoff Kelly (Assistant Director), Aimee Elivert (Analyst-in-Charge), Ada Nwadugbo, and Alexandra Squitieri made key contributions to this report. Also contributing to this report were Lucas Alvarez, Sarah Cornetto, Erik Gartland, Jean McSween, Mimi Nguyen, Jessica Orr, Jerry Sandau, and Almeta Spencer.

Related GAO Products

Foster Care: Additional Actions Could Help HHS Better Support States' Use of Private Providers to Recruit and Retain Foster Families. GAO-18-376. Washington, D.C.: May 30, 2018.

Foster Care: Most Tribes Do Not Anticipate Challenges with Case Goal Changes but HHS Could Further Promote Guardianship Assistance. GAO-16-625. Washington, D.C.: August 8, 2016.

Higher Education: Actions Needed to Improve Financial Access to Federal Financial Assistance for Homeless and Foster Youth. GAO-16-343. Washington, D.C.: May 19, 2016.

Foster Care: HHS Could Do More to Support States' Efforts to Keep Children in Family-Based Care. GAO-16-85. Washington, D.C.: October 9, 2015.

Foster Care: HHS Needs to Improve Oversight of Fostering Connections Act Implementation. GAO-14-347. Washington, D.C.: May 29, 2014.

Child Welfare: States Use Flexible Funds, but Struggle to Meet Service Needs. GAO-13-170. Washington, D.C.: January 30, 2013.

Foster Youth: HHS Actions Could Improve Coordination of Services and Monitoring of States Independent Living Programs. GAO-05-25. Washington, D.C.: November 18, 2004.

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