

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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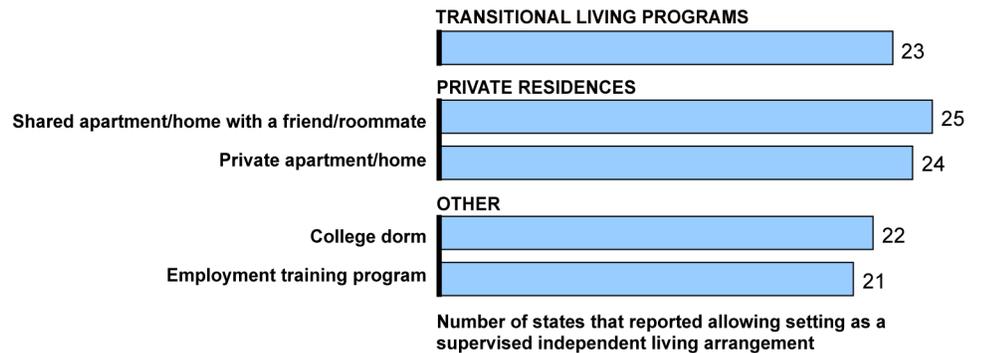
FOSTER CARE

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.