

## **Senator Clinton Introduces Legislation to Provide Support for Youth 'Aging Out' of Foster Care**

### **Capitol Hill Press Releases**

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For Immediate Release

#### Senator Clinton Introduces Legislation to Provide Support for Youth 'Aging Out' of Foster Care

Washington, DC -Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton introduced legislation today to provide individual development accounts to youth 'aging out' of foster care. The Focusing Investments and Resources for a Safe Transition (FIRST) Act provides foster youth financial support for critical independent living needs as they set out to develop self-sufficient, goal-oriented lives beyond the child welfare system. Senators Jay Rockefeller and Mary Landrieu are original cosponsors of the legislation.

"The needs of foster youth do not end after they leave the foster care system, and neither should our commitment to assisting them become productive and independent adults," Senator Clinton said. "This legislation will provide a bridge to adulthood for some of our most vulnerable young people. I will continue to advocate for them and for this bill."

Research indicates that youths aging out of foster care fare worse than their counterparts in the general population on a variety of social, educational, and health indicators. These youths report significantly lower levels of education and are more likely to be unemployed or homeless. Research also shows that foster youth do not receive the life skills education they need in order to be independent after aging out of the child welfare system.

The FIRST Act addresses this problem by providing foster youths with savings accounts so they can have funds set aside specifically for overcoming obstacles to independent living. The accounts will contain a federal deposit on behalf of foster youth matched by public and private community partners. After transitioning from foster care and completing money management training, youths would be able to withdraw these savings to pay for necessities such as educational opportunities, vocational training, and housing - elements critical for achieving self-sufficiency.

The bill follows the lead of smaller scale programs in cities and states all over the country. A program currently being piloted in New York City, Youth Financial Empowerment, will provide 450 New York City foster youths with Individual Development Accounts, or IDAs. Similarly, the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Passport program offers IDAs to foster youth in several cities. For more than 30 years, Senator Clinton has been a champion of efforts to help children in foster care and those aging out of the foster care system. As First Lady of the United States, Senator Clinton led numerous efforts to increase awareness about and support for youth aging out of foster care, and to increase the number of children who are adopted out of foster care. Senator Clinton worked towards passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, which has more than doubled the number of children adopted out of foster care, and the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, which doubled funding for the Federal Independent Living Program and helps older foster care children earn a high school diploma, participate in vocational training or education, and learn daily living skills. The legislation also requires states to serve youth up to 21 years old, which enables more young people to obtain a college education and allows states to provide financial assistance to these youth as they learn skills to enter the workforce. Finally, the bill allows states to extend health insurance coverage under Medicaid for foster care youth to age 21. In the Senate, Clinton has worked to further increase the number of adoptions out of foster care by providing additional incentives for adopting older children and those with special needs and

increasing the Adoption Tax Credit. She also has introduced legislation with Senator Olympia Snowe that would support relative caregivers who often offer stable, loving homes to children who would otherwise be in foster care. In 2002, the Senator introduced the Opportunity Passport Act, which, among other provisions, called for the establishment of IDAs for youth aging out of foster care. In July 2007, the Senate passed the Higher Education Amendments of 2007 which included a measure championed by Senator Clinton to expand the definition of independent students to include youth in foster care, aging out of foster care or emancipated minors.