

THE PROBLEM

- **Youth in foster care are in educational crisis.** Nationally, nearly half of youth who age out of foster care will not complete high school by age 18.
- **One the key causes of educational failure is frequent school moves.** In Pennsylvania, 35% of children who have been in foster care for 12-23 months have experienced three or more living placements – often changing schools with each new placement.
- **Frequent school changes hinder educational progress and leads to dropping out.** It is estimated that students lose four to six months of educational progress each time they change schools. Too often, when children in foster care change schools, they miss school or are placed in inappropriate classes while waiting for delayed records. Often their credits do not transfer properly and they have to repeat courses or whole grades, they lose hope, and, ultimately, drop out.
- **As a result of frequent disruptions to their education these youth are often unable to graduate on time.** Pennsylvania’s 500 different school districts have 500 different graduation requirements. Many children in foster care cannot meet the graduation requirements of the school they “land in last” as they had no opportunity to take certain classes.

We need to break the cycle of failure and poor life outcomes for children in foster care.

LEGISLATION THAT CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

- **Ensure that children in foster care can stay in the same school:** Students in foster care who change living placements must be able to stay in the same school when it is feasible and in their best interest.
- **Ensure immediate enrollment in a new school:** Ensure that students who do change schools are immediately enrolled in a new school with all education records provided.
- **Ensure that credits earned are counted:** Guarantee that credits earned in another school are accepted by a new school. In addition, youth in care need extra help to ensure that all records are promptly transferred between schools and graduation requirements can be met on time.
- **Increase graduation rates by ensuring that school districts work with these students through graduation planning and access to a State diploma:** Currently, the only way to receive a State-issued high school diploma in Pennsylvania is to be incarcerated. Youth in foster care who meet state graduation standards but cannot meet the requirements of the school district they “land in last” are out of luck. We need to change this. Youth in care who meet state standards but are unable to satisfy school district graduation requirements should be eligible to receive a state-issued diploma.

Many states have already passed such legislation to improve outcomes for children in foster care.

Pennsylvania must pass legislation to ensure that high school graduation does not remain beyond the reach of our most vulnerable students.

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