

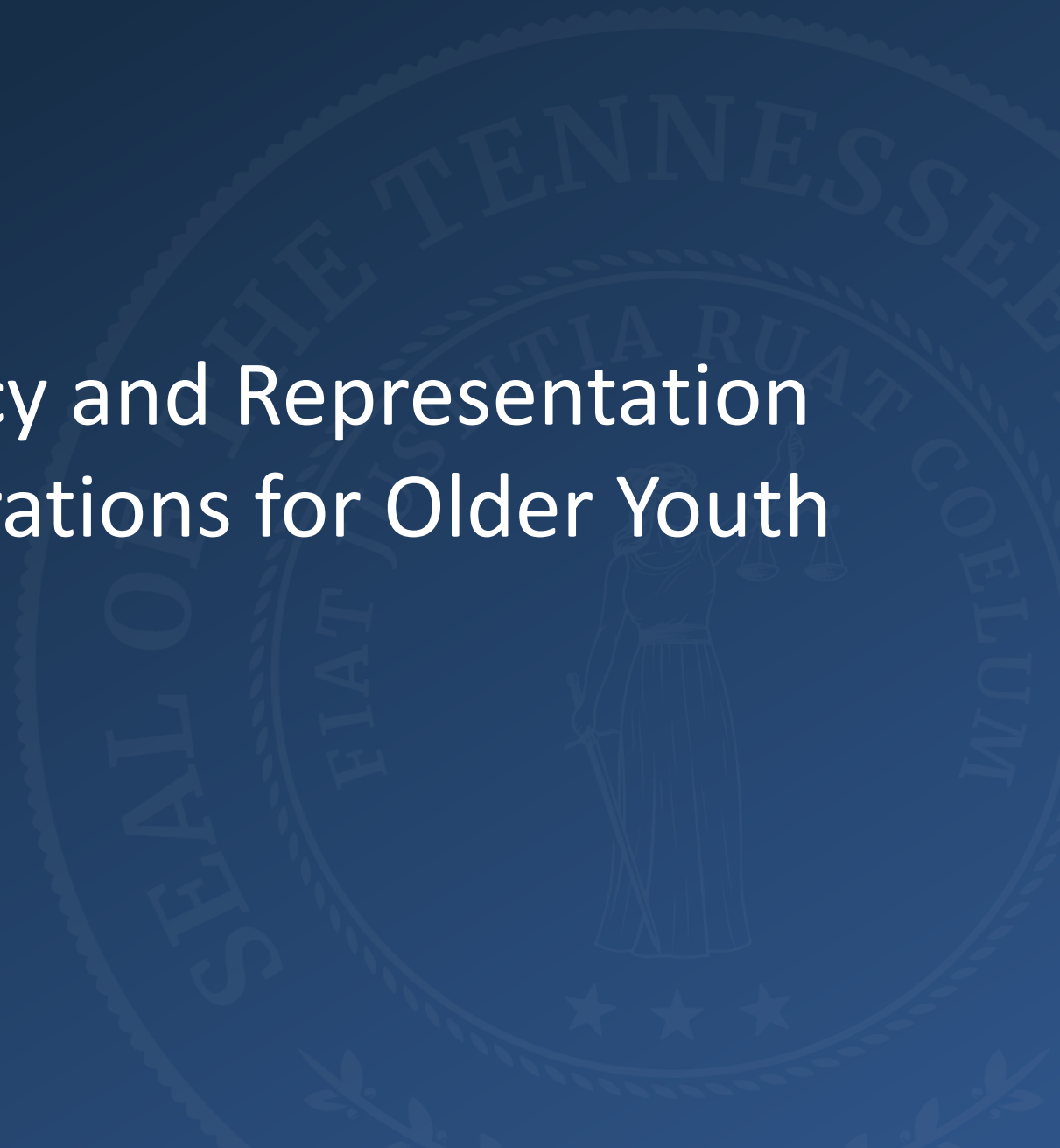


**Tennessee Bright Futures:
Supporting Transition Age Youth
and Young Adults in and after
Foster Care**

Objectives

- Explain the legal role and responsibilities attorneys and advocates working with transition -age youth.
- Describe the structure, eligibility requirements, and purpose of Tennessee's Independent Living (IL) and Extension of Foster Care (now Bright Futures) programs.
- Articulate important eligibility changes to the Bright Futures programs.
- Identify required Independent Living and Transition Plan components and timelines for youth ages 14-21

Advocacy and Representation Considerations for Older Youth



Best Interest

"Child's best interests" refers to a determination of the most appropriate course of action based on objective consideration of the child's specific needs and preferences. In determining the best interest of the child the guardian ad litem should consider, in consultation with experts when appropriate, the best interest factors. (Specific factors identified under Supreme Court Rule 40).

- Attorneys, CASA, FCRB: Talk to youth about their plans as they approach adulthood.
- Know what services are required or accessible through DCS and the community.



Foster Child/Youth Bill of Rights

All children/youth in DCS custody will be afforded the following basic right ...to be free from punishment that involves placing restrictions on or supervision of contact with legal representatives, including any appointed Guardian ad Litem or appointed counsel, with whom the foster child/youth has a right to discuss confidential information .

- The Department must provide information regarding the Foster Child/Youth Bill of Rights, including an explanation of the rights and how to report violations of these rights, to children/youth within 30 (thirty) days of entering DCS custody. The information must subsequently be provided annually to children/youth during regular permanency hearings, as per Tenn. Code Ann. § 37-2-409.
- Effective July 1, 2025



The background of the slide features a large, faint, circular seal of the State of Tennessee. The seal contains the text "THE GREAT SEAL OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE" around the top edge and "FIA JUSTITIA RUAT COELUM" around the bottom edge. In the center of the seal is a figure holding a scale of justice and a sword, with three stars below it.

DCS Independent Living Structure, Policy and Support for Youth in Foster Care

Office of Independent Living

Goal

Prepare youth in foster care and young adults who age out of foster care for a successful transition to adulthood to become confident and productive individuals in society.

Youth populations

- 14 to 16 custodial youth: Independent Living Plan
- 17+ custodial youth: Transition Plan
- 18 to 23 aged-out/adoption/SPG youth: Bright Futures

Organization

- DCS Central Office Administration
- Regional Independent Living Coordinators and Specialists



DCS Independent Living Services

Eligibility:

- **Custodial:** All youth in state custody 14 years of age or older.
- **Bright Futures :** Young adults who age out of foster care at age 18 or older.
- **SPG/Adoption:** Youth who exited state custody at or after 16 years of age, who are still under a contract for subsidy and need applicable IL Services. (Now eligible for Bright Futures)



Independent Living and Transition Plans

IL Plan 14-15

1. IL Life Skills
2. IL Social Skills
3. Credit Check

IL Plan 16-17

1. Essential Documents
2. IL Health
3. IL Finances
4. IL Employment
5. IL Transportation
6. IL Education
7. Housing

TL Plan 17 and up

1. IL Life Skills
2. IL Social Skills
3. Essential Documents
4. IL Health
5. IL Finances
6. IL Employment
7. IL Housing
8. IL Transportation
9. IL Education
10. Credit Check
11. Parenting



DCS Independent Living Wraparound Services

Independent Living Wraparound services are designed to support a wide range of independent living goals and needs. Services include funding for normalcy activities such as:

- Graduation Items
- Prom Attire
- Transportation
- Auto Insurance
- Driver's Education
- Extracurricular Activities
- Educational Fees
- Vehicle Repairs
- Tutoring
- Housing Start Up



Judicial Oversight & Youth Advocacy Before 18

Ages 14–16: Build the Foundation

- Law: IL Plan included in Permanency Plan (skills assessment in TFACTS; addressed in CFTM)
- Advocacy: Attend CFTMs; identify IL needs; coordinate services with case manager/IL specialist

Age 16: Court Review of IL Plan (TCA§ 37-2-409(4))

- Law: Court must review and ratify IL Plan
- Advocacy: Ensure plan is specific, realistic, and tied to actual services (housing, education, employment)

Age 17+: Prepare for Exit

- Law: Youth must understand post-custody services
- DCS must present evidence of available services at 18 Transition hearing required ~3 months before exit
- Advocacy: Confirm youth understands options (incl. EFC) Identify and raise gaps
- Ensure transition plan is concrete (ID, income, housing, supports)



The background of the slide features a large, faint, circular seal of the State of Tennessee. The seal contains the text "THE GREAT SEAL OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE" around the top edge and "AGRICULTURE" and "COMMERCE" around the bottom edge. In the center of the seal is a figure holding a scale of justice and a sword, with the Latin motto "AGRICULTURA RUAT COELUM" (Agriculture conquers the sky) inscribed below the figure. The seal is rendered in a light blue color that blends with the dark blue background.

Extension of Foster Care is now
Bright Futures in Tennessee

18-23

Bright Futures in Tennessee

What is “Bright Futures”?

Bright Futures is Tennessee’s Extended Foster Care program for young adults aged 18 to 23 who aged out of foster care at 18 or exited foster care via Adoption or Subsidized Permanent Guardianship after the age of 16.



Tennessee Bright Futures (July 1, 2025)

Group	Who is Eligible	Funding	Support After 18	Court Oversight
Bright Futures	Youth aging out of DCS custody at 18+ and meeting work/school criteria	Federal IV-E + State	DCS or YV case management, placement or ILA, scholarships, IL services	YES
Bright Futures – Adoption / SPG (NEW)	Youth adopted or exited to SPG at 16+ , after 18 , meeting work/school criteria	State	YV case management, ILA, scholarships & IL supports	NO
Bright Futures – Ages 21–23 (NEW)	Young adults continuing services up to age 23 , meeting work/school criteria	State	YV case management, ILA, scholarships & IL supports	NO

Bright Futures in Tennessee

Beginning January 1, 2023, eligible young adults must meet one of the five following EFC criteria:

- a) the young person is enrolled in secondary education or a program leading to an equivalent credential,
- b) the young person is enrolled in an institution which provides post-secondary or vocational education,
- c) the young person is employed for at least eighty (80) hours per month,**
- d) the young person is participating in a program or activity designed to promote or remove barriers to employment; or**
- e) the young person is incapable of doing any of the above activities due to a medical condition, including a developmental or intellectual condition (incapability is supported by regularly updated information in TP).



Bright Futures in Tennessee

Verification of education and employment

- school letter confirming enrollment
- letter of acceptance to post-secondary or vocational education program
- employment letter on company letterhead
- weekly or monthly check stubs
- letter of acceptance to employment readiness program
- ongoing monthly verification



Independent Living Bright Futures Support: Youth Villages LifeSet

- The Youth Villages LifeSet Program employs weekly case management services and engagement of experts in the areas of finance, education, and access to community resources to teach clients the necessary skills to achieve economic self-sufficiency, develop lasting relationships, and succeed independently.
- DCS expanded the LifeSet contract with the program to include case management for Bright Futures

LifeSet – The bridge from foster care to adulthood



Bright Futures Housing

- **Independent Living Allowance**

- *Apartment

- *College Dorm

- *Supportive adult

- *Family or Kin

- **Licensed or approved foster home**

- **Supervised Independent Living “SIL” Provider Settings**

- *Monroe Harding*

- *Omni*

- *Chambliss*

- *Partnership*

- *Furtherance Life*

- *Holston*

- *Smoky Mtn Children’s Homes*

- *Meritan*

- *TN Children’s Home*

- *Wayne’s Halfway House*



Bright Futures Responsibilities Under IV-E and TCA § 37-2-604

Remember many young adults who receive Bright Futures support are receiving support under state funds.

Requirements for young people who qualify for federal funding support under IV-E:

- Sign an agreement to participate.
- Work with the Child and Family Team to create and update a Transition Plan.
- Work with the team to reach Transition Plan goals.
- Meet monthly with their Bright Futures Worker to track the plan, identify any needed supports, and discuss how to achieve the Transition Plan goals.
- Attend a court review hearing or FCRB every six months; Permanency Hearing every 12 months.

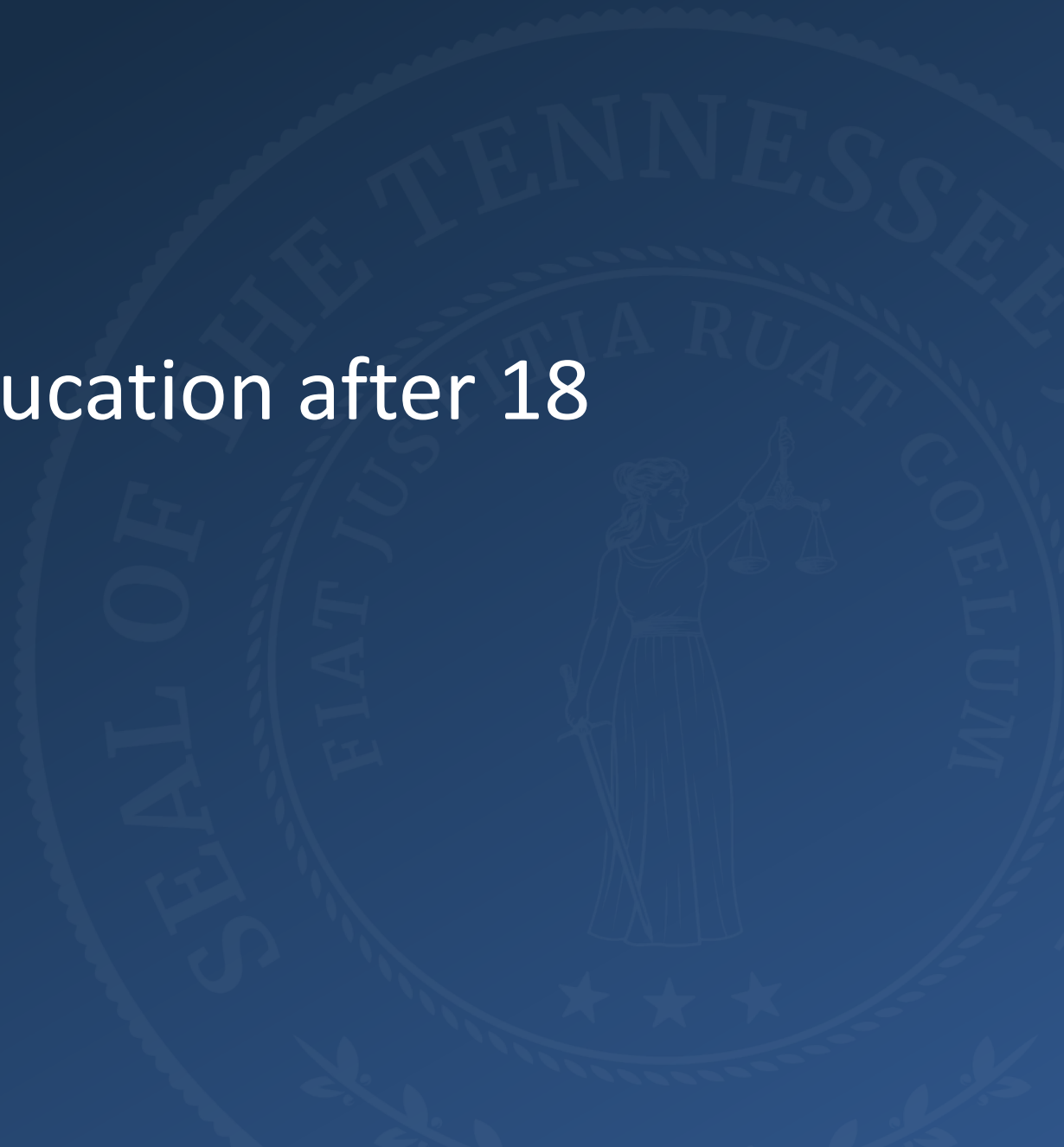


Reconnecting a Young Adult to Bright Futures

- Contact the regional DCS Independent Living Specialist
- Contact the Youth Villages LifeSet program
- Young adults may visit any local DCS office to obtain a Bright Futures application
- Call the DCS Independent Living toll-free number 844-887-7277
- Visit the DCS Independent Living website: Youth in Transition (tn.gov).



Education after 18



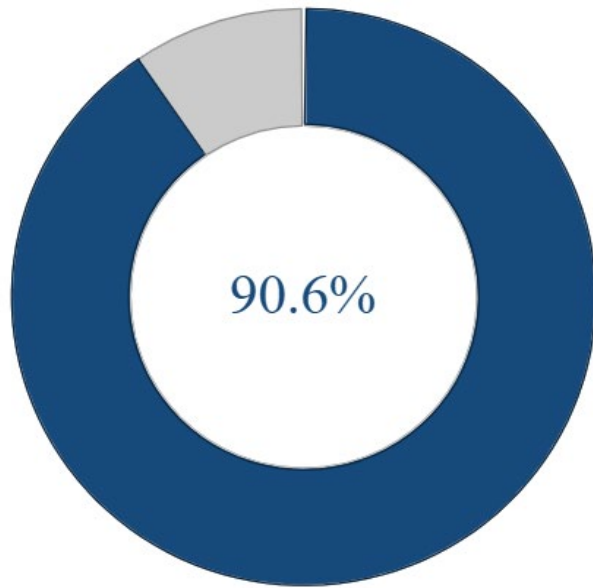
Finishing High School

Keep Track of Youth Goals and Plans Post Custody.

- Investigate living arrangements for youth turning 18 while in high school. This transition can be difficult.

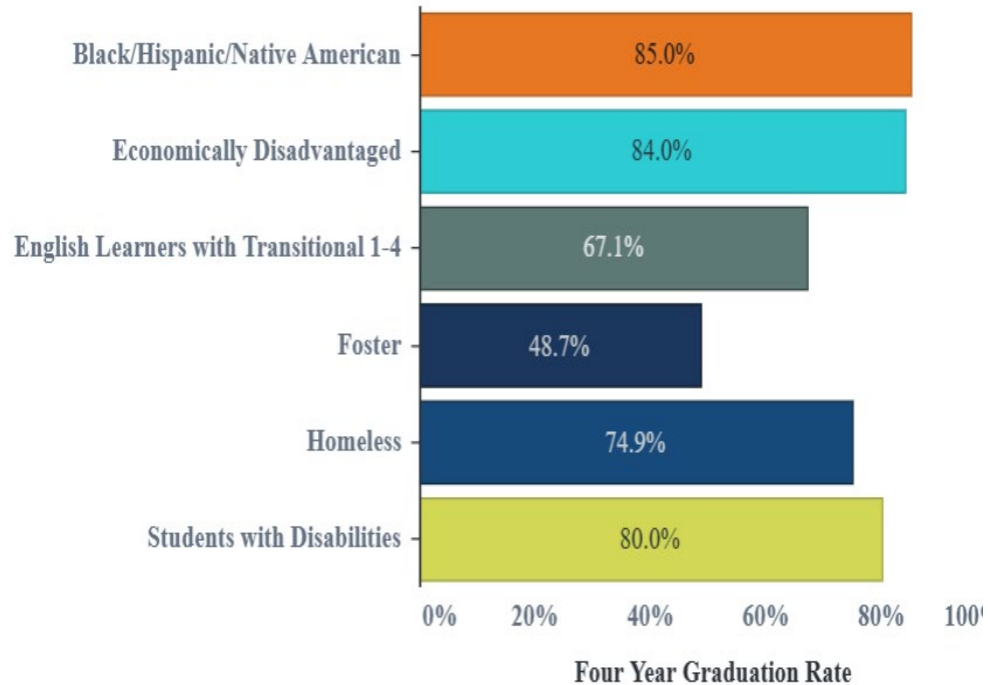


Tennessee Overall Graduation Rate



[TELL ME MORE](#)

Graduation Rate



[TELL ME MORE](#)

Graduation Rate by Student Group



High School Graduation

Employment Projections

Search Employment Pro. [Go](#)

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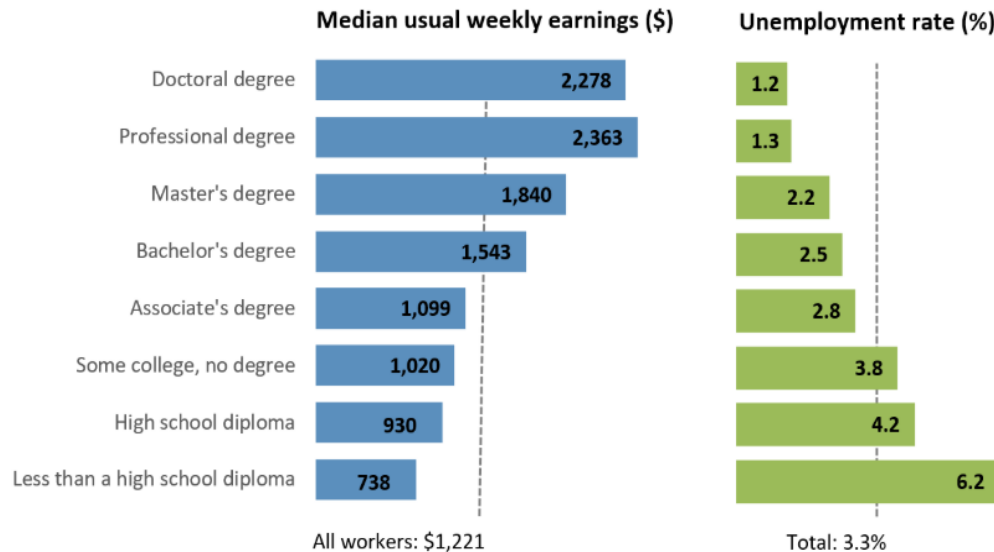
[EP Methods](#) ▾

[About EP](#) ▾

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Education pays

Earnings and Unemployment Rates by Educational Attainment, 2024



Note: Data are for persons age 25 and over. Earnings are for full-time wage and salary workers.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.



Tennessee Diploma Options

Regular high school diploma.

- Alternate academic high school diploma (Special Education).

Diplomas for eligible students receiving special education

- (These do not count toward the graduation count)
- 1. Special education high school diploma;
- 2. Occupational high school diploma.



Paying for College – Education and Training Voucher (ETV)

ETVs are grants awarded to eligible youth and young adults to fund expenses for eligible post-secondary institutions. Youth and young adults may receive up to \$2,500/semester or \$5,000/year, available up to age 26.

The ETV Program is intended to serve

- Young adults who emancipate to adulthood directly from state custody at or after 18 years of age.
- Youth 16 years of age or older in DCS custody.
- Youth 16 years of age or older who exit DCS custody through adoption or Subsidized Permanent Guardianship.
- Youth who lose eligibility for Education and Training Vouchers.



Paying for College – Bright Futures

State-funded Bright Futures Scholarship only: (up to \$2,500/semester or \$5,000/year, available up to age 26)

- Youth who exit to permanency at age 16 or older.
- Youth who have exited state custody from a Youth Development Center or detention after age 16.
- Youth who are in a YDC or detention who are attending a post-secondary program.
- Youth who lose eligibility for Education and Training Vouchers.



Tennessee HOPE Foster Child Tuition Grant

A Tennessee HOPE Foster Child Tuition Grant for a student attending an eligible public postsecondary institution shall be the cost of attendance less any gift aid with the total award not exceeding the cost of tuition and mandatory fees at an eligible postsecondary institution. Gift aid means scholarships and grants from any source that do not require repayment, including funds provided through the federal Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 and other similar programs. Student loans and work-study programs shall not be considered gift aid.

- A Tennessee HOPE Foster Child Tuition Grant for a student attending an eligible four-year OR two-year independent postsecondary institution shall not exceed the statewide average tuition and mandatory fees for a public four-year or two-year postsecondary institution.
- Eligibility: Meet minimum HOPE Scholarship eligibility requirements (ACT 21/ GPA 3.0) AND official certification from the Department of Children's Services that the student meets the eligibility requirement for the HOPE Foster Child Tuition Grant.



Post Secondary Foster Care Liaisons

The Foster Care Youth Outreach Liaison Program on college campuses

- The purpose of the liaison is to serve as:
 - (1) A knowledgeable source of information for youth who are in foster care, participating in extension of foster care, or are former foster youth regarding existing resources at the higher education institution; and
 - A point of contact between the department of children's services and the higher education institution regarding the special needs of these youth in order to increase retention and graduation among this population.



Post Secondary Foster Care Liaisons

Community Colleges

- Chattanooga State
- Cleveland State
- Columbia State
- Dyersburg State
- Jackson State
- Motlow State
- Nashville State
- Northeast State
- Pellissippi State
- Roane State
- Southwest TN
- Volunteer State
- Walters State

Universities

- Belmont
- East TN State
- Middle TN State
- University of Memphis
- University of TN @Knoxville
- University of TN @Martin



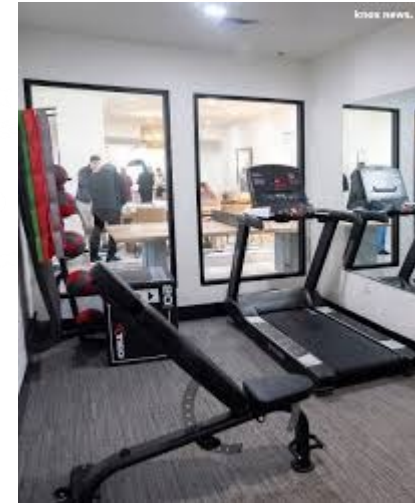
Youth Advocacy: Education

- For youth approaching discharge or age 18, advocates for the child should ask youth about educational goals.



Additional Supports: HUD Foster Youth to Independence

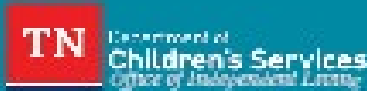
- Lumen Flats (Knoxville, TN)



Regional Graduation Celebration Events



2026 Graduation Celebration Events



ennessee
Alliance for
Kids

invite you to a regional

2026 GRADUATION CELEBRATION

FEATURING A KEYNOTE SPEAKER, RECOGNITION CEREMONY, AND COLLEGE, CAREER, AND RESOURCE FAIR *plus* FOOD, GIFTS, & FUN!

SAVE THE DATE! REGISTRATION WILL OPEN SOON



GRAND WEST

TUESDAY, JULY 21ST
12-3PM CST

COGIC: MASON TEMPLE
930 MASON ST.
MEMPHIS, TN 38126



GRAND MIDDLE

TUESDAY, JUNE 23RD
12-3PM CST

CHURCH OF THE CITY
828 MURFREESBORO RD,
FRANKLIN, TN 37064



GRAND EAST

TUESDAY, JULY 14TH
1-4PM EST

COKESBURY CHURCH
9919 KINGSTON PIKE
KNOXVILLE, TN 37922

Questions?

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