



July 3, 2008

The Honorable Pete Stark  
U.S. House of Representatives  
239 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Stark:

On behalf of the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) and our public and private member agencies across the country who work directly with abused, neglected, and otherwise troubled children, youth, and their families, I write in strong support of the Healthy Transition Act of 2008 (H.R. 6375). You have long been a champion for children and families and have worked tirelessly to ensure that Americans get the quality physical and mental health care that they need. Your latest effort, the Healthy Transition Act, laudably focuses on an often overlooked, yet extremely important segment of our population—young adults aged 18 to 26 with serious mental illness.

The GAO report released in conjunction with the introduction of H.R. 6375 finds that at least 2.4 million young adults aged 18-26 experienced a serious mental illness in 2006, which in turn negatively impacts their education and employment prospects. As the GAO report also indicates, young adults formerly in the foster care system are a particularly vulnerable population. Between 20,000 and 25,000 young people exit the foster care system each year and because there is an age limit on federal funding and only certain transitional services are available to them, these young people often find themselves truly “on their own.” They have few, if any, financial resources, no place to live, and little or no support from family, friends, and community. This uphill battle is often made steeper because a disproportionate number of youth and adults formerly in foster care experience mental health disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder and major depression and over a third of them entirely lack health insurance.

Your legislation would greatly ease the transition into adulthood for all young people with serious mental illness, including those formerly in our nation’s foster care system. Making grants available to states to develop and implement statewide coordination plans that better deliver needed services and are adequately tailored to this population’s needs, under the purview of H.R. 6375, these young people would have the opportunity and mindset they deserve to prosper and become healthy, productive citizens.

Thank you again for your leadership on this issue. We look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure that the mental health needs of all children, youth, and adults are met.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christine James-Brown". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "C".

Christine James-Brown  
President/CEO  
Child Welfare League of America