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Contact: Maura Keaney
415-250-1875

**New Survey Provides Comprehensive View of Young People Transitioning from Foster Care
*Youth Believe Services Provided Past Age 18 Are Critical***

December 4, 2014 – Sacramento, CA. The baseline findings from an unprecedented study evaluating the impact of extending foster care on youths' outcomes were released today. The CalYOUTH Study, a five-year project from 2012-17, will provide California with valuable perspective to understand the impact of extending foster care and what additional policies and programs will be needed in the future. The baseline findings on 17 year olds still in care provide insight into the needs and aspirations of young people approaching the transition from foster care to adulthood in California.

"The CalYOUTH study provides us with meaningful insights into our foster care system," said Will Lightbourne, Director, California Department of Social Services. "Understanding the experiences of youth currently in care will allow us to implement policies that truly support successful transitions to adulthood."

In 2008, the federal government passed the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act marking a fundamental shift in supporting foster youth transitioning to adulthood. California was one of the first states to adopt the extension of foster care through age 21 with the 2010 passage of Assembly Bill 12, the California Fostering Connections to Success Act.

The authors of the report from Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago conducted interviews with 727 youth who were an average of 17 years old at the time. These young people will be interviewed again when they are 19 and 21 years old, respectively. The study is the result of a collaborative effort among the California Department of Social Services, the County Welfare Directors Association of California, and five private foundations. Dr. Mark Courtney of Chapin Hall will be presenting the initial findings at a meeting of the Child Welfare Council in Sacramento on December 10.

"In the next three years, the study will take a deeper look into the needs of subgroups of youth and will also compare young people's and caseworker's perspectives," said Dr. Mark Courtney, Chapin Hall. "This work will offer important guidance to California as well as other states that are extending foster care."

The study found that foster youth experienced significant health and mental health challenges compared to their peers, which is not surprising given the abuse and neglect they experienced prior to entering foster care. Over half reported symptoms indicating that they suffered from a mental health or substance use disorder and one-third reported having received medication in the past year for emotional problems. Nearly one-quarter of them had attempted suicide at some point in the past. The young people were also much more likely than their peers to have engaged in delinquent behavior; nearly two-fifths had been arrested at some point in the past. These findings speak to the need for continuing mental and behavioral health services for these young people and of the potential for extended foster care to alter their life trajectories in early adulthood.

"AB 12 [the extension of foster care] has given me more help, support, and more time to figure out where I want to go with my life. If it weren't for AB12, I probably wouldn't have even had a fighting chance. It's provided me with enough support that I'm not afraid to focus on my education, but enough independence that I am now confident enough to move out and live on my own," said Meredith Ku, 19 years old, Santa Clara County, California Youth Connection Member.

Researchers also found that most youth were satisfied with their experience in the foster care system and wanted to continue receiving services after age 18, citing the desire to continue their education and to receive housing and other material support as their top reasons to stay in the system. Four-fifths of youth surveyed reported that they wanted to graduate from college, though many were behind in school and would need time to catch up in order to achieve that goal. .

"It is important for us to support the needs as well as the aspirations of youth in care," said Frank Mecca, Executive Director, County Welfare Directors Association of California. "Access to housing and other programs provided through extension of foster care will result in positive outcomes for foster youth."

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