

February 11, 2025

The Honorable Mark Pearson, Chair
House Children and Family Law Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 206-208
33 North State Street
Concord, NH 03301

RE: New Futures' Support for SB 661, relative to the department of health and human services management of social security payments, supplemental security income payments, and veterans benefits for children in foster care.

Dear Chairman Pearson and Honorable Members of the Committee:
New Futures appreciates the opportunity to offer testimony in support of HB 661. New Futures is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that solves problems through policy change. New Futures is dedicated to supporting and strengthening a comprehensive and integrated System of Care for children and youth who experience behavioral health challenges in New Hampshire.

New Futures supports HB 661 because ensuring youth in foster care have access to financial resources is a proven way to reduce the impact of adverse childhood experiences and gives them the best opportunity to succeed.

Countless studies have shown us that early experiences literally shape the architecture of the developing brain. We also know that some kinds of stress can derail healthy development. Certain experiences are so severe or chronic that they produce toxic stress in children, which damages developing brain architecture, leading to lifelong problems in health, learning and behavior. Commonly referred to as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), these experiences occur frequently for children in the foster care system. Experiencing even four ACEs during childhood has been linked to poor health, education, and financial outcomes. Further, for children in foster care, children who have higher ACE scores have increased odds of experiencing placement instability.¹ Even more concerning, living with low income is associated with increased risk for poor mental health and that material hardship in particular is associated with and precedes poor mental health.²

The good news is that ACEs can be mitigated. Protective factors are conditions that mitigate or eliminate risk from ACEs. Promotive factors are conditions that actively enhance well-being. Taken together, protective and promotive factors increase the probability of positive, adaptive and healthy outcomes, even in the face of risk and

¹ Liming, Kiley, Adverse Childhood Experiences and Foster Care Placement Stability (2021).

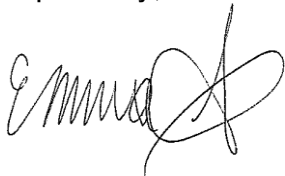
² See (Sareen, 2011) (Austin, 2017) (Lanzi, 1999) (Heflin, 2009) (Manual, 2012).

adversity. Concrete supports, such as access to financial resources are both protective and promotive factors.³ For example, in a small program where some low-income residents of a town were given a stipend of \$500 per month for two years, residents who received the stipend experience improved financial stability and mental health, and notably, increased rates of full-time employment compared to the control group who didn't receive the payment.⁴

HB 661 would similarly protect income for youth in the foster care system, so that they may have access to it after they are adopted or age out of the system. Guaranteeing income for this population will provide stability, giving a better chance for improved mental and physical health outcomes.

HB 661 is a small step that can have huge impacts on youth in the foster care system. Ensuring financial stability is critical to the long-term health and well-being of this population of youth. For these reasons, New Futures urges the committee to vote HB 661 Ought to Pass.

Respectfully,



Emma Sevigny, Esq.
Children's Behavioral Health Policy Coordinator
New Futures, Inc.

³ Center for the Study of Social Policy, Concrete Support in Times of Need.

⁴ See Teisman, Rachel, California Program Giving \$500 No-Strings-Attached Stipends Pays Off, Study Finds (2021) (<https://www.npr.org/2021/03/04/973653719/california-program-giving-500-no-strings-attached-stipends-pays-off-study-finds>).