

# The Foster Youth to Independence Program in Oregon

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## Abstract

*Youth homelessness in Oregon is a growing concern, as it is nationally. In an effort to support homeless youth, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) implemented the Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) program, which provides housing vouchers to former foster youth. In Oregon, 4 of the 24 public housing authorities have applied for and received FYI vouchers. In Oregon, and nationally, many former foster youth have yet to benefit from this resource.*

Each year, roughly 4.2 million adolescents in America experience some form of homelessness. Counting homeless youth is a challenge, in part because of the varying definitions of youth homelessness. For example, the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, Oregon's Revised Statute 417.799, and HUD all have different definitions of youth homelessness. That discrepancy poses a challenge for creating and maintaining a coordinated data entry system, thereby making it even harder to obtain and track consistent and reliable data on youth homelessness in Oregon. HUD defines homeless youth as persons under age 25 who are not accompanied by a parent or guardian and are sleeping in emergency shelters or transitional housing for the homeless or in a place not intended for human habitation (HUD, 2014; Oregon Department of Human Services Homeless Youth Advisory Committee, 2016).

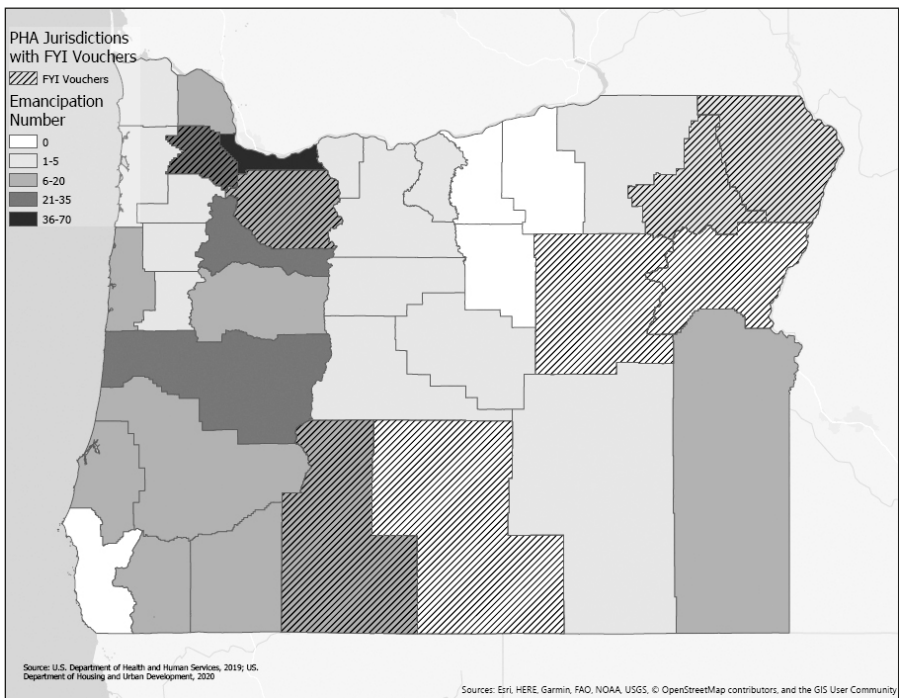
HUD requires Continuums of Care (CoCs) to conduct a Point-in-Time (PIT) count of the unsheltered and sheltered homeless populations on an annual basis (HUD, 2020a). Per the PIT count that took place in Oregon in 2019, the state has 1,696 homeless youth (661 unaccompanied or parenting homeless youth younger than age 18, and 1,035 unaccompanied

or parenting homeless youth ages 18–24). Because of the challenges of counting youth homelessness, the tallies are different among agencies. Comparatively, the Oregon Department of Education reports that Oregon contained 24,237 homeless youth in the 2018–2019 school year—a substantial difference from the official PIT count numbers (Oregon Department of Education, 2019). Although those conflicting numbers reflect the challenge that exists in counting homeless youth, it also suggests a great need to support youth in Oregon.

Between 25 and 30 percent of young people who are homeless have had previous experience with foster care (Dworsky et al., 2019). In Oregon, 32 percent of youth who had been in the foster care system have experienced homelessness (National Youth in Transition Database, 2018). Young people who transition out of foster care often are unprepared to live on their own and are therefore at a higher risk of homelessness (National Youth in Transition Database, 2019). Of the 3,359 youth who left the foster care system in Oregon in fiscal year 2019, 293 youth (or 8.7 percent) emancipated, or “aged out,” leaving those youth with a need for housing resources (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). Exhibit 1 demonstrates the number of youths aging out of the foster care system in Oregon, per county. To support youth who are housing insecure after exiting the foster care system, HUD established the Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) program in 2019. The intent of this initiative is to support youth who have been in foster care by providing them with subsidized housing.

### Exhibit 1

Oregon Foster Youth Emancipation by County and Public Housing Authorities (PHA) Receiving Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Vouchers



On July 26, 2019, HUD's Secretary, Dr. Ben Carson, announced the initiation of the FYI program, which provides housing assistance to young people aging out of foster care who are at risk of homelessness (HUD, 2019). Youth younger than age 25 may receive an FYI housing choice voucher from their local public housing authority (PHA). Applying for vouchers in Oregon requires a partnership between the PHA, the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS), and the local CoC.<sup>1</sup> To apply for a voucher, ODHS must refer foster youth to a PHA for an FYI voucher. In addition to receiving the FYI voucher, recipients receive 36 months of supportive services, which are administered by their local public child welfare agency (HUD, 2020b).

Since the initiative launched, 31 states have received funding and 822 individuals have received vouchers, totaling more than \$6.7 million in funds to support youth who might otherwise become homeless.<sup>2</sup> In Oregon, 30 youth have received FYI vouchers since the program began, with more vouchers in the works. Exhibit 1 illustrates the PHAs and their county jurisdictions that applied for and received FYI vouchers. The 22 PHAs have jurisdiction over the 36 counties in Oregon, with some PHAs representing multiple counties. Of the 22 PHAs in Oregon, 15 were eligible for FYI vouchers before the new notice came into effect in October 2020. As of October 2020, eligibility requirements have changed, making all 22 PHAs eligible for FYI vouchers, as long as certain metrics are met.<sup>3</sup> Four PHAs have received vouchers, representing eight counties, as shown by the hatched shading on the graphic. The remaining PHAs are eligible to apply for FYI vouchers but to date have not yet done so. PHAs, ODHS, and CoCs may coordinate the request for more vouchers, reflecting an important partnership that exists between the three types of entities. The graphic demonstrates the need for vouchers and the potential that many PHAs and their jurisdictions have in applying for FYI vouchers. In exhibit 2, the black bars indicate the PHAs that receive FYI vouchers.

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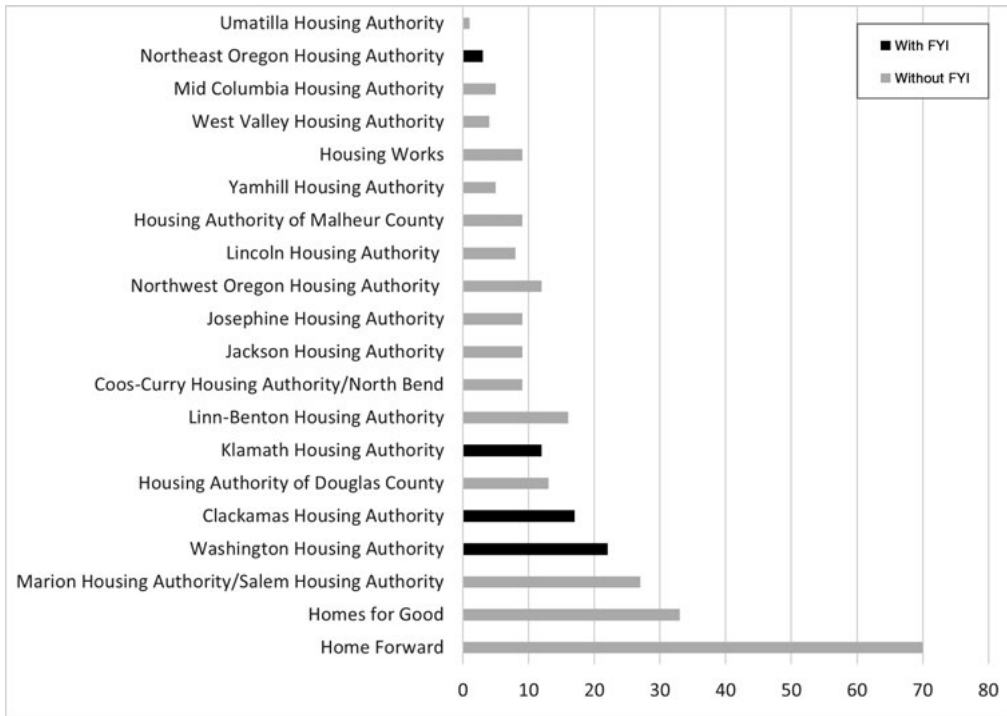
<sup>1</sup> HUD's Office of Field Policy and Management is tasked with supporting the relationship between CoCs, PHAs, and ODHS—a relationship that is necessary for a strong FYI program.

<sup>2</sup> The states that have received FYI vouchers include Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin.

<sup>3</sup> PHAs who administer Family Unification Vouchers (FUP) must achieve 90-percent unit utilization of FUP vouchers to be eligible to apply for FYI vouchers.

**Exhibit 2**

**Oregon Foster Youth Emancipation by Public Housing Authority Jurisdiction**



*FYI = Foster Youth to Independence.  
Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019*

Young people who have aged out of the foster care system will continue to require housing support. The partnership between PHAs, ODHS, and CoCs is a valuable one that will continue to support youth at risk of homelessness. Much of the state of Oregon is still eligible to receive FYI vouchers, and more work remains to be done to ensure that youth have access to this resource, particularly in counties with higher emancipation rates. Most PHAs in Oregon have not received FYI vouchers, demonstrating the need to use this resource fully.

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