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Report Cites Need for NY College Support After Foster Care

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — Data show one-quarter of New York kids aging out of foster care will be homeless within four years, and half of them will be unemployed at 24.

In response, 17 social services and advocacy groups want the state to provide college support initially to 375 young people and more in the future.

The coalition, following a report last year on the problem, estimates 4,000 young adults in New York's foster care system are college age, and only 20 percent will ever step onto a campus. About 20,000 kids are in the system at any given time.

"The instability of multiple home and school placements, a lack of emotional and financial support from parents and the prospect of aging out of the foster care system at age 21 with no support system are just some of the barriers that prevent many foster youth from reaching their potential," a new report said.

The report was written by Community Service Society staff on behalf of the Fostering Youth Success Alliance.

Former New York Chief Judge Judith Kaye, who chairs the state's Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children, noted that one-quarter of kids aging out of foster care will be caught up in the criminal justice system.

"The reality is this: As teenagers approach the age of independence, far too many leave foster care without the stability of a family or the benefit of an education," Kaye said. "The opportunity for a college degree can go a long way to mitigate these dismal consequences and provide a better path to the future."

With 22 other states offering full tuition waivers, the coalition said New York should launch a program offering financial aid plus counseling on filing applications, finding tutors and getting other support.

It would cost \$2.9 million for the initial group, rising to about \$8.6 million for 1,216 in the program's sixth year and beyond.

The report estimates that the \$8.6 million would yield public savings from increased tax revenues from earnings and decreased public expenditures of \$28.2 million

based on estimates of 40 percent of foster care kids graduating in two-year college programs and 50 percent in four-year programs.

"The longer young people are in foster care, the more difficult it can be for them to get out, whether it's a reunification with their families or finding an adoptive family to offer a safe, loving home," said Phoebe Boyer, chief executive of The Children's Aid Society. "And the absence of family supports has substantial repercussions as teens approach adulthood and independence, especially with regard to their decisions about higher education and career opportunities."

In 2015, about 11,000 children will enter New York's foster care system. For some, it's a short stay away from a crisis at home, though for many it's longer with major social and economic consequences that aren't their fault, according to the coalition.