



WRISING VOICES

When the System Is Already Struggling, Why Are We Cutting More?

As someone with lived experience in Kentucky's foster care system, it's frustrating — and honestly discouraging — to see proposed budget cuts to the Department for Community Based Services (DCBS). This is the agency responsible for supporting some of the most vulnerable children and families in our state, including foster youth, kinship caregivers, and the workers who help keep the system functioning.



Christina Mangrum

According to the Kentucky Center for Economic Policy, the most recent state budget includes a 9.1% reduction — about \$118.5 million — to DCBS's base funding, making it one of the deepest cuts the agency has faced in over a decade.

To people outside the system, that may just sound like a budget adjustment. But to those of us who have lived it, we know these decisions have real consequences.

Kentucky is already experiencing a shortage of foster homes. In fact, recent reporting shows that hundreds of children have had to stay in offices, hotels, or other temporary placements due to lack of available foster families, highlighting just how strained the system already is.

When funding decreases, the impact isn't abstract — it affects whether youth have stable placements, whether foster parents feel supported enough to continue fostering, and whether caseworkers have manageable caseloads.

MEET THE VOC



Christina Mangrum



Betsy Echeverria

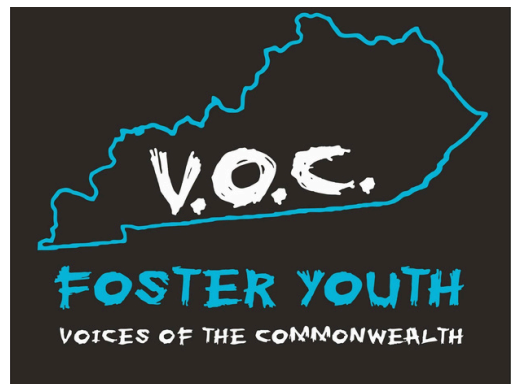


Andrew Gomez



Brianna Moore

Lexi Salamone



The VOC is comprised of Kentucky foster care youth and alumni aged 16-23 and is instrumental in communicating to foster/adoptive parents, out of home care staff and community partners the issues and needs of youth in care and those who have aged out of the system.

The VOC advocates for positive change in the foster care system. Members of the VOC work closely with various people including CHFS staff, judges, CASA staff, state officials, private childcare agencies, educators and more. The VOC also works with current and former foster youth to develop strategies for a brighter future as well as to educate them about their rights, responsibilities, available resources and the policies that effect their life.

WE'RE HIRING!

THE VOC IS LOOKING
FOR **YOUTH!**

APPLY NOW AT
KYRISE.KY.GOV

**REPRESENTATION IS ESPECIALLY
NEEDED FROM THESE REGIONS:**

JEFFERSON

SALT RIVER TRAIL

NORTHERN BLUEGRASS

EASTERN MOUNTAIN

CUMBERLAND

SOUTHERN BLUEGRASS

UPCOMING EVENTS



Their Truth Screenings

April 30: Lyric Theatre Lexington KY

Regional Events

May 2: Two Rivers Educational Event

May 29: Northern Bluegrass Graduation Party

June 2: Salt River Trail KYRISE Event

June 4: Lakes KYRISE Event

June 16-17: 2026 Youth Empowerment Conference

WHEN THE SYSTEM IS ALREADY STRUGGLING, WHY ARE WE CUTTING MORE?

Christina Mangrum, VOC Co-Chair

We are already seeing what happens when the system is stretched too thin. Foster parents leave because of burnout, lack of support, or financial strain. Youth struggle to access stable housing, reliable transportation, employment opportunities, and educational resources once they age out of care. Workers who support these families often feel overwhelmed and underpaid for the emotional weight of their responsibilities.

Cutting resources in a system already facing shortages risks making these problems worse.

Research shows there are currently more than 8,700 children in out-of-home care in Kentucky, many of whom experience multiple placements during their time in care. Each placement change can disrupt education, relationships, mental health progress, and long-term stability.

From a lived experience perspective, one of the most concerning realities is how easy it can be for this population to be overlooked. Many youth leaving care are focused on surviving and moving forward, not revisiting painful experiences publicly or advocating for systemic change. Trauma, exhaustion, or simply wanting to move on can keep people silent about the challenges they faced.

But silence should never be mistaken for lack of need.

When resources are reduced, youth often feel the impact long after they leave care. Housing insecurity, lack of financial support, limited employment opportunities, and mental health struggles can follow them into adulthood. At the same time, foster parents may feel less equipped to continue opening their homes if financial and systemic support decreases.

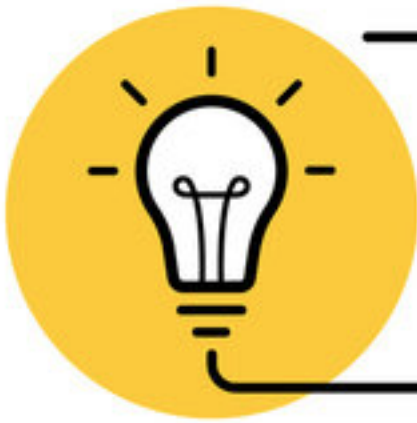
If the goal is long-term stability for children and families, investment in foster care systems should be seen as preventative – not optional.

Strong systems help youth transition successfully into adulthood. Stable placements help children build trust. Supported foster parents are more likely to continue fostering. Adequately funded agencies can recruit, train, and retain skilled, emotionally-driven workers.

Budget decisions send a message about priorities. If we want better outcomes for youth, families, and communities, funding should reflect the importance of protecting those who rely on the system for safety and stability.

Foster youth are not statistics. They are future workers, parents, leaders, and community members.

When we invest in them, we invest in Kentucky's future.



DID YOU KNOW?

The Aetna SKY program was created just for youth like you! They provide services, resources, and support beyond health care.



Aetna Sky

Check it out here:

<https://www.aetnabetterhealth.com/kentucky/supporting-kentucky-youth.html>

Kentucky RISE app launches!

TEAM KENTUCKY
CABINET FOR HEALTH AND FAMILY SERVICES

- » Explore resources for current & former foster youth
- » Get the latest news
- » See events calendar
- » Message support staff
- » Use the lockbox to secure important documents

Free in the Apple App Store and Google Play Store. Scan this code for fast access!

Kentucky RISE
RISE
Kentucky Resources for Independence Success & Empowerment
Get Started

EARN & LEARN SPOTLIGHT

Congratulations Caleb, who recently earned his GED! He's now enrolled for fall classes to pursue a Business Communications certificate at KCTCS.

"The earn and learn program helped me by giving me the chance to have higher education and giving me the opportunity to better myself. Yes, I know they give you money to go to school and that's great and all but that's not all it's about. They have given me the chance to get my GED which led me to seeking for higher education. Now I'm able to get a degree in something and be different from what I was raised around. For my near by future, I hope to get a degree in something, and I wouldn't have been to achieve any of this without earn and learns help. "

Earn and Learn supports current and former foster youth in boosting their earning potential through the completion of short- term training programs or earning their GED.

Registration for the Fall Session opens April 25th! Register at kyrise.ky.gov.



Hello! I'm Madison Padilla. I am a mom, wife, and 4th grade social studies teacher.

I am also a former foster kid.

My first advocate was my 2nd grade teacher, Ms. Gilbert. She taught me how to tie my shoes and was patient when I fell behind my peers. After so many years of mirroring the agreeable parts of my friends and trying to make them my own, Ms. Gilbert provided me with a safe space to be myself. From then on, I knew I wanted to do the same for others.

I started to panic during my senior year of high school. I was going to be a first-generation college student, and I had no idea where to start. Luckily, my social worker guided me through the Tuition Waiver and ETV process. Suddenly, college was no longer a far-fetched dream. It was accessible, and so were my dreams of becoming a teacher like Ms. Gilbert.

The Educational Training Voucher has now allowed me to pursue my masters degree as well. It has opened doors I never knew existed.

"Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination." - Mary Oliver

If you are a foster youth slowly approaching adulthood, I ask you to be creative with the hopes of your life. You can achieve them all.

Madison – Current ETV Participant. Graduated from WKU with a Bachelor's Degree in Interdisciplinary Studies and a current student at the University of the Cumberlands pursuing her Masters of Arts in Teaching



COORDINATOR CORNER

Krystal Carver-Dickens

Krystal is the Independent Living Coordinator for the West side of Kentucky. She graduated with her Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology (2016) and her Master of Arts degree in Sociology from Western Kentucky University (2018). Krystal has experience working with youth in out of home care as a Case Manager and Program Coordinator.

Contact Krystal

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Ally Holtrey

Ally is the Independent Living Coordinator for the East side of Kentucky. Originally from Owensboro she graduated with her Bachelor of Social Work degree from Murray State University (2022) and her Master of Social Work degree from Campbellsville University (2024). Ally interned with the Training Resource Center and has experience with community outreach and working with at risk youth.

Contact Ally

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