



DIVISION X
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE



Capacity Building
CENTER FOR STATES

Building on the Lessons Learned From Division X Implementation

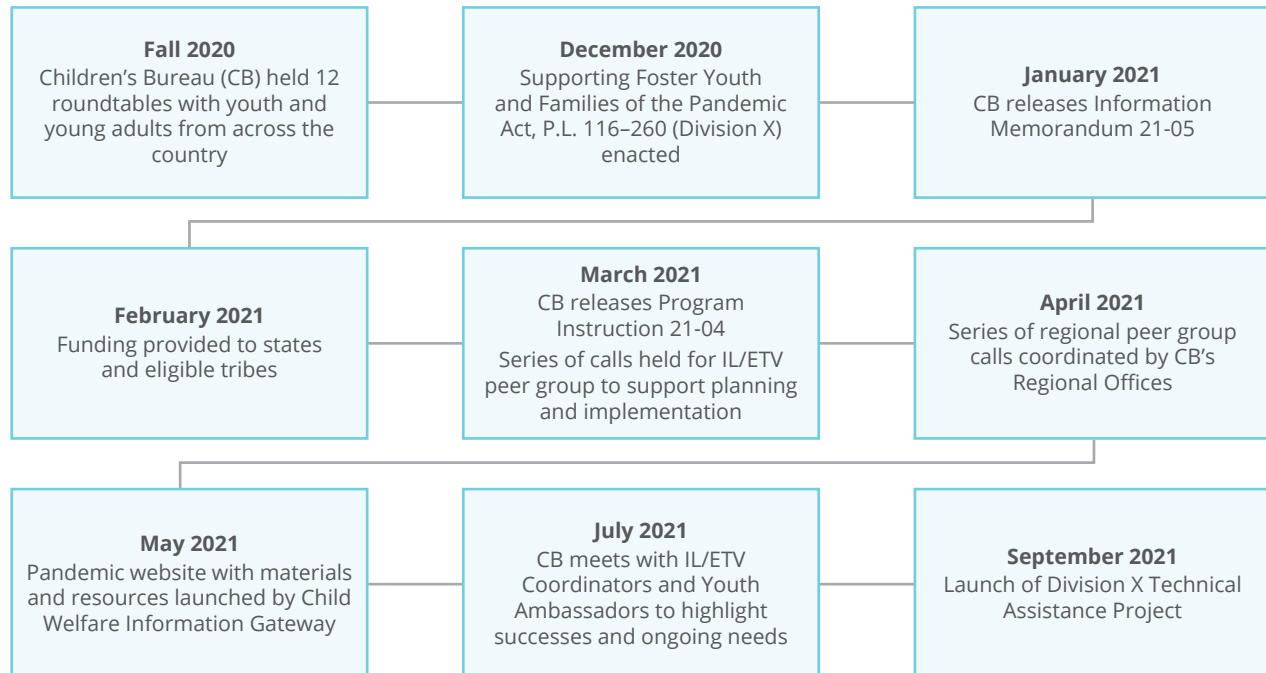
Purpose: To provide child welfare professionals and youth and young adult leaders with a high-level overview of Division X, and to highlight the opportunities and lessons learned from the implementation of the legislation’s funding and program flexibilities.¹ The lessons reflected in this document can serve as a foundation for child welfare agencies to build on the successes of enhancing or developing new programs and policies and to continue innovating to better meet the needs of youth and young adults.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021, P.L. 116–260, was enacted in December 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and public health emergency. **Division X** of P.L. 116–260, the “Supporting Foster Youth and Families Through the Pandemic Act,” included funding for various programs and required agencies to take actions to protect and support youth and young adults currently or formerly in foster care.^{2,3}

Section 3 of Division X provided funding increases and programmatic flexibilities to ensure the continued safe operation of child welfare programs and support for older foster youth. Section 4 of Division X prevented the aging out of foster care during the pandemic and provided for reentry into foster care for youth who had aged out since the pandemic began.

The following timeline illustrates the progression of legislative and implementation directives and events that preceded the establishment of the Division X Technical Assistance project.

Division X Technical Assistance Development Timeline



¹ Additional funding provided by Division X is available for expenditures over a 2-year period from October 1, 2020 – September 30, 2022, and must be liquidated by December 30, 2022.

² Children’s Bureau, [Information Memorandum 21-05: Summary of the Legislation](#)

³ Children’s Bureau, [Program Instruction 21-04: Instruction and Guidance for Implementation](#)

Foundational Background

On behalf of CB, in March 2021, the [Center for States](#) convened Independent Living and Education Training Voucher (IL/ETV) Coordinators, more than 100 youth and young adult ambassadors, child welfare administrators, finance representatives, and other stakeholders with a critical role in implementing Division X provisions for a series of virtual peer group conversations in April 2021 intended to lay the groundwork for the Division X Technical Assistance project.

"We can be creative and innovative to find solutions that work to support youth/young adults to thrive into adulthood (rather than just survive this transition)."

IL/ETV Coordinator

These conversations provided a space for peer learning and problem solving, including exploring potential strategies and promising practices, sharing information/resources, and identifying additional needs and capacity building supports. Specific topics of peer conversations included Chafee program funds, ETVs, the distribution of emergency cash assistance, driving and transportation programs and assistance, developing public awareness campaigns for voluntary reentry, notification to eligible youth, and extended foster care placement. The Division X Technical Assistance project built on the work of the Center for States by continuing the series of peer group conversations and capturing the innovations and lessons learned to share with the field. The remainder of this document explores the innovations and lessons learned throughout the implementation of the Division X Technical Assistance project.

Youth-Adult Partnership as a Cornerstone of Implementation

"Being flexible was key. Being able to pivot when needed and planning earlier. Listening to our young people on what they were experiencing. Creating safe space for young people to express how they were being impacted."

IL/ETV Coordinator

In 2019, CB released [Information Memorandum 19-03](#) to demonstrate that family and youth voice are critical to a well-functioning child welfare system and to encourage all public child welfare agencies and their partners to work together to ensure that family and youth voice are central in program planning and improvement efforts. Building on this guidance, in May 2021, the Children's Bureau issued the [Dear Child Welfare Directors](#) letter and the [Program Instruction 21-04](#) urging agencies to involve and engage youth and young adults with lived experience in the planning and implementation of the Division X provisions. This included involving youth advisory boards or other youth leadership

groups to meet with and advise the agency as well as hiring young people into the workforce to help other young people navigate resources, connections, and more. Below are some of the ways state agencies partnered with youth and young adults in the planning and implementation of the Division X provisions, including serving in paid roles as peer support, mentors, or advocates:

- Arizona hired two Youth Advocacy Specialists in December of 2020 when the Pandemic Act was passed and has continued to grow this program since then. Youth Advocacy Specialists provided support for youth ages 14 and older and helped bridge the gap for transition-aged youth who needed support to communicate with other child welfare staff. The Youth Advocacy Specialists assisted caregivers with rules and structures in homes and congregate care, engaged with pregnant and parenting youth, and identified more positive placements for youth beyond congregate care options.
- In response to the pandemic, Indiana hosted youth-led workgroups resulting in a youth-led town hall. Multiple stakeholders, partners, and young people were involved in the town hall. The discussion provided an opportunity to explore available services and encourage youth to use various virtual platforms and formats to communicate. Art (e.g., poems, spoken word, music) and TikTok were some of the platforms used.
- Kansas conducted outreach early in the pandemic to all young people. A youth advisory board provided feedback on needs and discussed implementation ideas for Division X. Kansas implemented "Wellness Wednesdays," which provided a space for youth and young adults to express themselves throughout the pandemic. "LifeSkills Saturdays" were implemented to provide support to youth in the form of virtual activities, such as mindfulness exercises and vision boards.

"I was able to go to and graduate college, have a roof over my head, and therapy."

Youth Ambassador

- Oregon conducted surveys at the beginning of the pandemic and, based on the responses, expanded services to the age of 23. Foster Youth Connection reviewed the survey materials and workgroups were formed to move Oregon from a child welfare system to a youth welfare system. Focusing on the equity and delivery of services, Oregon also reached out to traditionally underserved populations, including Tribal nations, coordinators for homeless and runaway youth, and others who qualified for the provisions.

Increased Opportunities to Leverage Collaborations

In addition to youth-adult partnerships, engagement and collaboration with internal and external partners helped facilitate effectiveness, efficiency, and responsiveness to individual needs. Internal collaboration across different areas of an agency fostered teamwork, efficiencies, and successful organizational change. IL/ETV Coordinators and young adult leaders worked with fiscal managers, other program managers, agency leaders, policy and legal teams, and IT teams to identify and address systems barriers and limitations. Internal collaboration efforts included the following:

- Developing hotlines
- Launching virtual application portals
- Eliminating determining factors for welfare eligibility to allow access to services
- Updating websites and communication platforms to become more youth friendly and accessible
- Revising relevant policies, programs, and protocols to be more inclusive and be youth informed

“... the additional funding and flexibilities helped a young person obtain a job, housing and transportation, and stability so that her daughter could be reintegrated.”

IL/ETV Coordinator

External collaboration with other agencies and community organizations was critical to increasing the availability and integration of services for youth and young adults, including identifying those most disconnected from services and supports. IL/ETV Coordinators and young adult leaders partnered with community-based and national organizations in the following initiatives:

- Supporting marketing and public awareness campaigns
- Conducting outreach to eligible youth and young adults
- Providing flexible payment options
- Establishing information and referral systems

California was one of many states to use Division X funding to increase access to technology for transition-age youth and young adults.

California partnered with [Ticket to Dream](#) to purchase approximately 800 laptops and 1,000 Wi-Fi hotspots for youth formerly in care who were attending community college. This effort made it easier for many community colleges to begin technology loan programs that provided laptops to youth in care, which the state was able to further support through the formation of additional community partnerships.

“It allowed me to maintain my living space as well as maintain my grades, since I didn't have to get two extra jobs during the pandemic.” **Youth Ambassador**

Collaboration and partnership were not without their challenges. States reported that stakeholders had different ideas on how the funds could be used and not all were consistent with the program instructions or requirements. In some cases, partnerships were not enough to overcome the bureaucratic and legislative constraints. In some states, legislative action was required to allow for the reentry of youth and young adults and, in other cases, no resources or infrastructures existed to support reentry.

Colorado is an example of how a state overcame this challenge and passed the [Foster Youth in Transitions Program](#) bill that extended foster care reentry long after the Division X provisions expired. Some of the identified lessons learned include the need to plan for engagement of strategic stakeholders, develop clear communication plans, and examine program requirements and limitations earlier in the process.

The following tables present additional highlights from the peer group conversations focused on pandemic challenges, key Division X provisions, implemented strategies and solutions, and other examples from the field.

Waiving Limitations on Funds Used for Housing Assistance and Eligibility			
Pandemic-Related Challenge	Division X Provision and Opportunity	Implemented Strategies and Solutions	Example From the Field
<p>Safe and stable housing and employment are critical to ensuring that youth can transition from care safely and successfully. Connecting youth with stable housing has been a long-running challenge for jurisdictions.</p> <p>There were multiple pandemic-related housing challenges identified, including finding housing for youth returning to care, the 30% funding cap on housing, forming and maintaining partnerships that would give jurisdictions access to more housing, and the rising costs of rent and living.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Division X allowed states and Tribes to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Use more than 30% of Chafee funds for room and board payments. □ Use Chafee room and board amounts for otherwise eligible youth who are aged 18–26 and experienced foster care at age 14 or older. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Assisted youth in meeting living expenses, including paying for rent, groceries, grocery or meal delivery, and utilities; assistance also included helping youth make back payments and fees and/or paying for expenses for youth and young adults who need to stay home for extended periods of time ○ Expanded availability of economical housing solutions (e.g., “tiny homes”) ○ Established eviction moratoriums ○ Launched a landlord risk mitigation program to encourage smaller landlords to support housing/rentals for young people ○ Created emergency housing for those displaced by the pandemic 	<p>With the flexibilities provided by the Division X legislation, Kansas was able to prepay rent and reimburse youth and young adults for housing expenses. The stable housing and added supports also facilitated the reunification of children to parenting youth and young adults during the pandemic in this state and others.</p>

Increased Program Funding and Flexibilities

Pandemic-Related Challenge	Division X Provision and Opportunity	Implemented Strategies and Solutions	Example From the Field
<p>Limited cash flow and a lack of financial literacy training made many aspects of transitioning out of care more challenging. Some states identified challenges around providing cash assistance that included determining the best avenues for providing youth with funds, understanding how to properly use voucher and grant programs, and deciding eligibility for specific funding streams.</p> <p>There also was hesitancy to provide cash assistance to youth and young adults without a financial literacy component since, in some cases, the full payment might be spent too quickly and without adequate budgeting by the young person.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Division X allowed states and Tribes to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Provide Chafee and ETV services and assistance to eligible youth until age 27 for fiscal years (FY) 2020 and 2021. □ Increase the maximum ETV award amount from \$5,000 to \$12,000 through the end of FY 2022 □ Use ETVs to help support youth to remain enrolled in a postsecondary education or training program, including for expenses that are not part of the cost of attendance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Developed a hotline to quickly provide direct cash payments to youth ○ Used gift cards (e.g., ride share, gas cards, pre-paid cash cards) ○ Established partnerships with credit unions and banks to give youth access to funds, improve credit, and increase financial literacy. ○ Provided unrestricted onetime or monthly direct financial assistance to youth/young adults ○ Purchased cell phones, tablets, laptops, internet service, cell phone plans, or other technological tools for young people 	<p>Montana formed community partnerships with credit unions throughout the state to provide youth with savings accounts so that funds could be deposited by the state and utilized by the youth. Credit programs were also formed to provide youth access to information about credit cards and financial literacy training was provided by the credit unions. Foster care service providers acted as liaisons for these programs, informing youth and supporting them through the process.</p> <p>The credit unions also served important supporting roles, allowing youth to apply for the program directly from their website and calling youth when they expressed challenges or barriers. Montana praised the flexibility and willingness of the credit unions through the COVID-19 pandemic and expressed optimism for the future potential of these community partnerships.</p>

Access to Driving and Transportation Assistance

Pandemic-Related Challenge	Division X Provision/ Opportunity	Implemented Strategies/ Solutions	Example From the Field
<p>Obtaining a driver’s license is a rite of passage that fosters normalcy during the transition to adulthood; however, youth and young adults in foster care often face significant barriers to driving.</p> <p>Challenges with driving and transportation included securing funding for targeted driving and transportation programs. There was also an identified need to tailor driving and transportation resources to meet individual youth and young adult needs. Additionally, for programmatic changes, states were challenged with identifying effective youth engagement strategies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Division X allowed states and Tribes to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Provide an otherwise eligible youth aged 15–26 with up to \$4,000 per year in Chafee funds for driving and transportation assistance.⁴ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Used alternative funding sources outside those typically provided through child welfare channels ○ Established relationships with partners to negotiate discounts (e.g., driver’s education programs) ○ Provided gift cards for transportation-related expenses ○ Allocated upfront funding of long-term driving expenses for youth transitioning out of care (e.g., insurance) ○ Issued requests for proposals to provide driving hours and obtain licenses, provided matches to purchase vehicles, connected with the community to find mechanics to inspect vehicles upon purchase 	<p>The Kentucky Resource for Independent Success and Empowerment (KY RISE) partnered with Goodwill Industries of Kentucky and the Kentucky Department for Community Based Services to sponsor the Goodwill Cars to Work program. The program provided eligible foster youth with up to \$4,000 in grant money for the purchase of a vehicle. Goodwill also provided a down payment match of \$500 and a fixed 5% interest rate regardless of credit score history. If a program participant pays their loan in full and on time, Goodwill will offer an interest reimbursement.</p>

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⁴ The \$4,000 per year cap expired on September 30, 2021.

