

Testimony of Melissa Hackett  
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In Support of LD 431, An Act Regarding Driver's Licenses for Individuals in Foster Care

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Melissa Hackett. I am a policy associate with the Maine Children's Alliance, which serves as the backbone organization for the Maine Child Welfare Action Network, where I am the coordinator. I am testifying in both capacities today in support of this legislation.

Learning to drive in the teen years is a rite of passage and a bridge into young adulthood. With it comes independence, and the chance to access opportunities like work and education. Yet young people in foster care experience greater barriers to driving. It is estimated that nationally around 3% of youth get their drivers' license while they are still in care.<sup>1</sup> And without a driver's license, young people in foster care often miss out on these important youth experiences and work and education opportunities that contribute to their success into adulthood.

In my advocacy work, I have often engaged with individuals and groups of young people with foster care experience, to ask them what they would want to see change to improve their opportunities for success. It has surprised me how often being able to drive has come up in those conversations, becoming an area of focus for young people working in leadership groups.

This legislation provides an important opportunity to be responsive to what young people with foster care experience want to change. It is appropriately comprehensive, covering access to getting a permit, driver's education, driving hours, a license, and greater access to insurance and a vehicle. This approach would ensure that from start to finish of the driving process, young people in foster care would be better supported in achieving this milestone.

The transition to adulthood is an important and often challenging phase for young people, but youth aging out of foster care often experience this without permanent adult relationships or the resources that often come with that. This group of young people experience significant challenges during this transitional period, across a variety of issues, including successful high school completion, stable housing, justice involvement, early parenthood, and employment.<sup>11</sup> Being supported to learn to drive and being able to drive is

an important tool for young people to unlock access to activities, work, and education. We should robustly support efforts like this legislation that seek to remove barriers and make driving and the independence that comes with that, a reality for all youth in foster care.

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> Voices for Virginia's Children, Foster Their Destination: Removing Barriers for Youth in Foster Care to Obtain A Driver's License, <https://vakids.org/posts/foster-their-destination-removing-barriers-for-youth-in-foster-care-to-obtain-a-drivers-license#>

<sup>ii</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Child Welfare and Foster Care Statistics, <https://www.aecf.org/blog/child-welfare-and-foster-care-statistics>