

1 **Texas Foster Youth Network**
2 **Discussion Paper**

3 **Background**

4 Since 2011, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) has made youth in or formerly in foster
5 care a priority population over all other equally qualified individuals except eligible veterans. In
6 addition to service priority, TWC supports 18 Foster Youth Transition Centers (Transition
7 Centers) across the state through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds,
8 which provide an array of services supporting foster youth as they transition into adulthood and
9 the workforce. TWC also hosts an annual statewide foster youth conference that brings together
10 Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards), Transition Centers, and other partners who are
11 helping youth in or formerly in foster care achieve and sustain economic prosperity.

12 **Issue**

13 In June 2023 the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services reported 10,850 children
14 in foster care, not representing the total in substitute care. Of those children, 2,368 are between
15 the age of 14-17; second only to the number of children ages 0-2. Foster teens (age 14-17)
16 preparing themselves to age-out of the foster care system, along with foster youth (age 18-26)
17 who have aged out yet still qualify for services and benefits, need resources to help them
18 transition into adulthood, the workforce, and institutions of higher education. Although there is
19 an abundance of resources available, for which foster teens/youth are eligible it can be extremely
20 overwhelming to navigate the various websites, programs, agencies, requirements, and
21 applications.

22 Having seen the success of the Texas Veterans Network, where funds were granted for the
23 development of regional networks who provide services and support to veterans, we would seek
24 to replicate that reach of service among foster youth. In FY 20-FY 23 the TX Veterans Network
25 held over 1,500 network building events (116% target), over 250 trainings/workshops (201%
26 target), over 84,000 referrals made in the Veteran Referral System (210% target) and over
27 48,000 unduplicated Veterans serviced using the Veteran Referral System (133% target).

28 **Decision Point(s)**

- 29 1. Seeking approval for staff to bring forward a formal initiative for a Texas Foster Youth
30 Network. The Texas Foster Youth Network initiative will support the development of a
31 statewide network composed of organizations whose missions includes providing
32 services and support to Foster Youth and former Foster Youth (for example, Texas
33 Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), other Community-Based
34 Organizations (CBOs), Local Workforce Development Boards, and other entities) as well
35 as to create opportunities to share referral and service information that will allow for
36 coordination of services.
- 37 2. Set aside an amount up to \$4 million dollars for a Request for Proposal to be awarded
38 during Fiscal Year 2025.