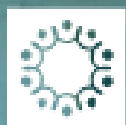


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CARES 2025 REPORT A YEAR OF MOVEMENT BUILDING



Introduction



This year has been a year of movement building for the CARES Initiative. Through consistent virtual convenings, public advocacy, conference presentations, and an in-person Summit, CARES Ambassadors and staff have amplified youth voices and strengthened partnerships to drive policy change. Centered on the leadership and perspectives of those most impacted by systems, this collective effort is building momentum toward lasting, equitable solutions that support transition-age youth.

Strengthening Team and Strategy: *Virtual Convenings & New Ambassadors*

These regular virtual gatherings were the backbone of CARES' movement-building throughout 2025. Ambassadors and staff connected monthly and bi-weekly to collaborate, sharpen leadership skills, and drive youth-centered policy change. Agendas ranged from unpacking legislative developments and evaluating new regulations to brainstorming strategies that tackle real-world barriers faced by transition-age youth. Each monthly convening was a working session that built on the last, designed to deepen Ambassadors' expertise in CARES' youth-developed priorities, strengthen their ability to engage in policy conversations across multiple forums, and identify key partners to move the work forward. The bi-weekly sessions also offered space for strategizing advocacy approaches in real time. A visual guide—the “Road to October”—anchored the group's momentum, tracking progress and laying out the groundwork for the Movement Makers Summit in Washington, DC. This steady cadence of focused convenings has contributed to a group of Ambassadors who are agile, informed advocates centering the real needs of transition-age youth.

A core strength of CARES is its national reach and representation. Ambassadors bring their experience and leadership from New York, Atlanta, and Los Angeles—ensuring that youth perspectives from across the country shape every aspect of our work. This year, we were excited to expand our community by welcoming new Ambassadors who bring fresh insights, energy, and deep commitment to driving change for transition-age youth.

Regginald Holloway-ATL
Tyee Washington-ATL
Ka-Leah Muchison-LA
Cheyanne Deopersaud-NY

Nadirra Monroe-NY
Anthony Turner- NY
Kyra Stoute- ATL

WELCOME

Driving Systems Change: *Testimonies and Public Statements*

Throughout 2025, CARES advanced policy change on the national stage by drafting and submitting published letters of support, written Congressional testimony, and public statements on pressing federal and state reforms. Each piece reinforced CARES' call for centering the needs of transition-age youth at every level:

Sign-On Letter Supporting the Protecting Health Care and Lowering Costs Act-

CARES facilitated a sign-on letter backing the Protecting Health Care and Lowering Costs Act, championed by Senate Minority Leader Schumer and Senators Wyden, Merkley, Shaheen, and Luján. This critical legislation would repeal harmful Medicaid cuts in H.R. 1 and permanently extend ACA premium tax credits. The letter highlights the unique challenges these cuts pose to young people—especially those transitioning from foster care—and asserts that every youth deserves reliable access to the health care they need, when they need it. The full letter is available

[@ Here](#)

Written Testimony to the House Work & Welfare Subcommittee-CARES provided written testimony for two key hearings engaging federal policymakers:

o Leaving the Sticky Notes Behind: Harnessing Innovation and New Technology to Help America's Foster Youth Succeed:

CARES submitted testimony highlighting the role of technology and innovation in improving outcomes for youth aging out of foster care. The testimony emphasizes the need to leverage digital tools to strengthen connections between young people and the adults, programs, and services that support them, while protecting the privacy and rights of youth whose data is collected and shared across systems. CARES calls for the development of accessible, real-time resource databases co-created with youth, streamlining eligibility and enrollment processes for programs like the Chafee Education and Training Voucher (ETV), and ensuring timely funding to prevent interruptions in education and support. The testimony also underscores the urgency of safeguarding sensitive information, advocating for privacy protections modeled on HIPAA and mechanisms that allow youth to control their personal data. Furthermore, CARES urges Congress to mandate meaningful youth engagement in the design, implementation, and continuous evaluation of Chafee-funded programs to increase accountability and improve effectiveness. Read the full testimony

[@ Here](#)



Driving Systems Change: *Testimonies and Public Statements*

o **Aging Out is Not a Plan — Reimagining Futures of Foster Youth:** CARES submitted testimony emphasizing the need to strengthen Chafee by aligning it with the developmental realities and lived experiences of youth aging out of foster care. The testimony calls for extending eligibility for all Chafee-funded programs through emerging adulthood to reflect research showing that many young people are not fully prepared for adult responsibilities until their mid- to late twenties. It also highlights the inadequacy of the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) funding and urges Congress to increase support, eliminate age-based access limits, and improve flexibility consistent with typical college timelines.

Additionally, the testimony underscores the critical role of supportive adult and peer navigation to help young people access resources and manage their transitions—recommending new federal funding to create navigator programs that provide consistent, community-based support beyond foster care exit. Lastly, it advocates for greater accountability by requiring states to meaningfully engage young people in Chafee program design, implementation, and evaluation, increasing transparency and responsiveness to the youth these programs serve. Read the full testimony [@ Here](#)



Driving Systems Change: *Testimonies and Public Statements*

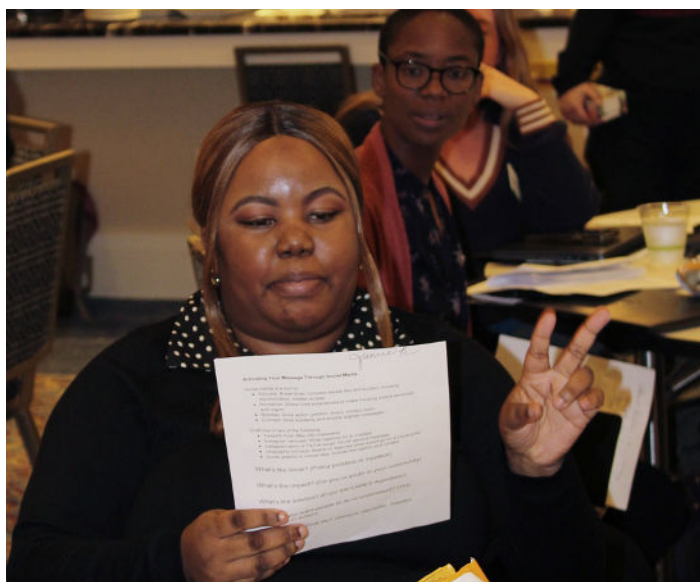
Public Statement on the Federal Tax and Budget Bill—In response to the tax and budget bill signed into law on July 4, CARES issued a public statement expressing concern over provisions that fall short of supporting youth who experience foster care. The statement includes personal stories from Ambassadors that illuminate the real-life impacts of current budget decisions. It calls for urgent, clear policy reforms to ensure federal budgets better meet the needs of young people transitioning out of care. Read the full statement

[Here](#)

Letter Supporting Increased Funding for Pell Grants—CARES joined a coalition letter led by the Institute for College Access & Success, urging Congress to address a \$2.7 billion shortfall in the Pell Grant program. Pell Grants are vital for low-income students—including youth who experience foster care—to access postsecondary education and training. Without new funding, eligibility or award amounts could be cut, undermining student financial security and future opportunities.

Public Comment & Recommendations to Social Security Administration and HHS—CARES submitted official recommendations to the Social Security Administration and the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, calling for stronger protections and direct access to federal benefits for youth who experience foster care. Grounded in Youth Ambassadors' lived experience and community analysis, the comment advocates reforms to ensure youth who experience foster care can fully use their Social Security and SSI benefits to meet their current needs and support their future stability. Read the full public comment

[Here](#)



Advancing Youth Designed Solutions: *National Conferences*

Presenting at conferences is a vital part of the CARES Initiative's strategy to amplify youth voices, share our collaborative policy work, and build connections with stakeholders across the child welfare and youth advocacy ecosystem. These gatherings offer a platform for CARES Ambassadors and CSSP staff to spotlight the impact of our policy agendas, exchange ideas with peers and policymakers, and inspire broader action toward equity and systemic change. By engaging in dialogue, workshops, and panels, we ensure that the perspectives of transition-age youth guide the conversation and drive meaningful progress in policy and practice. This year we presented:

- o At the **Youth Villages Achieving Success Conference**, Ambassadors, Brana Phillips, and Vlad Bonds, and Liz Squibb led an interactive workshop, *"Empowering Transition-Age Youth: Co-Designing an Anti-Racist Policy Agenda for Lasting Change."* The team guided participants through the principles of anti-racist policymaking and shared how Ambassadors and staff have worked together to shape a national agenda centered on the real needs of transition-age youth.

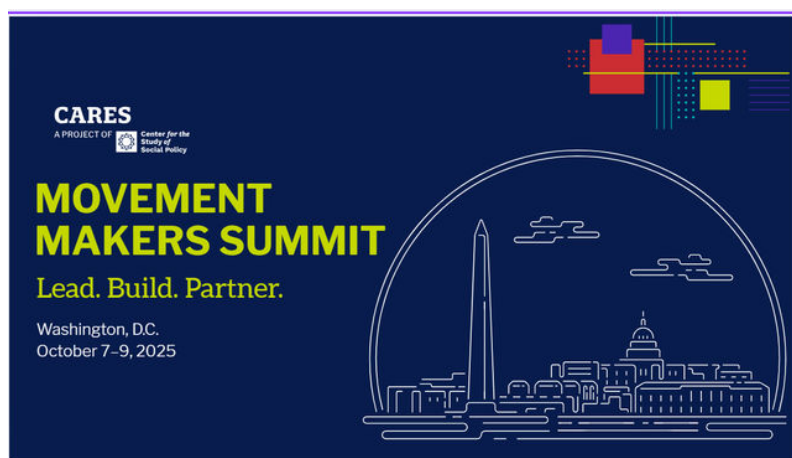
- o At the **2025 National Network for Youth Summit on Youth Homelessness**, Ambassador Gwendolyn Golding and Esi Hutchful co-presented *"Creating Communities that CARE for Young Adults."* This session brought youth-driven policy solutions to the forefront, sharing CARES' local and federal policy recommendations for building equitable, supportive housing systems and emphasizing centering youth leadership in policy change.

- o During **UConn's School of Social Work Innovations Institute's 2025 Training Institutes**, Ambassador, Jada Brigman, Shadi Houshyar and Liz Squibb, presented *"Creating Conditions to Affirm, Include, and Support Youth Transitioning from Foster Care."* The session highlighted the CARES co-created policy agendas and approach as a model for racial justice in child welfare. The team shared the importance of youth-centered, anti-racist approaches to advancing economic security, mental health, and opportunity for all young people transitioning from care.



Building Partnerships: *The 2025 Movement Makers Summit*

The October **Movement Makers Summit—Lead. Build. Partner.**—was the cornerstone event of our year, bringing together Ambassadors from Atlanta, Los Angeles, and New York, for three days of immersive policy strategy, leadership building, and community connection. The Summit opened with a keynote from Leonard Burton, President and CEO of CSSP, who welcomed Ambassadors and emphasized the urgency and shared responsibility of driving systems change for transition-age youth.

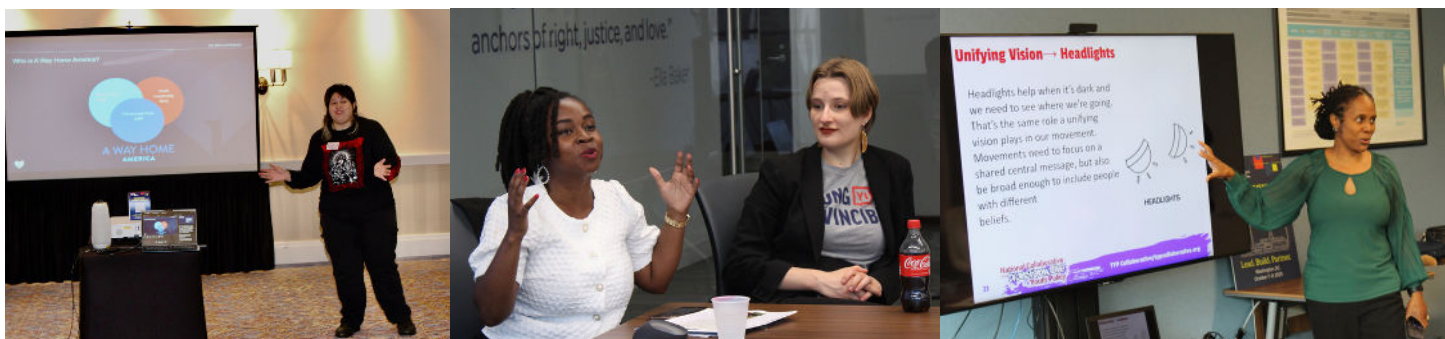


Day one centered on policy analysis and advocacy skill-building. Ambassadors mapped the latest challenges and opportunities in SNAP, Medicaid, and housing, applying lived experience to consider recommendations and advocacy targets. Each policy block transitioned into hands-on capacity-building workshops — developing public speaking, blog writing, and social media strategies—strengthening Ambassadors' existing skills in translating complex policy issues into compelling messages for decision-makers and the public.



Building Partnerships: *The 2025 Movement Makers Summit*

Day two took Ambassadors and team to the Children's Defense Fund office, where collaboration was the theme, culminating in three in-depth partnership dialogues with A Way Home America, the National Collaborative for Transformative Youth Policy, and Young Invincibles. Each session balanced presentations from Ambassadors outlining their policy vision and priorities, followed by discussions with national partners about ways to align, support each other, and pursue shared goals for system reform. Structured debriefs after each conversation allowed the Ambassadors to reflect, synthesize insights, and identify actionable next steps—ensuring they left each partnership with clear momentum.



Day three stitched together learning and relationship-building across the first two days with creative exercises—like mapping the “partnership ecosystem” with yarn and sticky notes that helped visualize connections and gaps in the youth advocacy landscape. Ambassadors voted to prioritize the most urgent and promising actions for transition-age youth going forward.



Building Partnerships: *The 2025 Movement Makers Summit*

By the conclusion, Ambassadors had deepened their policy expertise, strengthened their communication and advocacy skills, established key national partnerships, and collaboratively mapped out next steps for continued movement building.



WATCH OUR SUMMIT
HIGHLIGHT VIDEO



We extend our deepest gratitude to the **Children's Defense Fund** for generously providing meeting space, and to our partners **Kahran LaTourette (A Way Home America)**, **Nia West Bey** and the **Changemakers (National Collaborative for Transformative Youth Policy)**, and **Krystal Milam (Young Invincibles)** for their openness and willingness to engage in meaningful dialogue around shared goals and collaboration. Thank you as well to **Mission Partners**, the entire **CARES Initiative team at CSSP**, **additional dedicated CSSP colleagues** who served as advisors, and the **Close-in Ambassadors** whose energy and commitment fuel this work. We are especially grateful to **Leonard Burton, President and CEO of CSSP**, for his leadership, and to the **Conrad N. Hilton Foundation** for its steadfast support that makes all of this possible.

Acknowledgements

2025 CARES AMBASSADORS

Tiffany Cannon
Aisha Brezial
Shoshana Providence
Vlad Bonds
Danie Guzman
Gwendolyn Golding
Jada Brigman
Cheyanne Deopersaud

Kayonda Branch
Taneil Franklin
Brana Phillips
Muhchinu Rahman
Chanel Staggers
Jamie Kelley
Andre Konda
Tyee Washington

Sando Zou-Capuzzi
Elizabeth Villa
Jerry Calderon
Regginald Holloway
Nadirra Monroe
Kyra Stoute
Ka-Leah Muchison
Joseph Mariscal

Thank you to the CARES Ambassadors for your unwavering commitment and tireless efforts. Your dedication drives the CARES Initiative forward, and we are deeply grateful for all that you do.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation for its steadfast support and belief in the CARES initiative. This work would not be possible without your generosity and partnership.

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or

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