The following policy changes align with the recommendations of the Mississippi Youth Voice youth board as outlined in our [2023 Pathways to Independence](https://firstplaceforyouth.sharepoint.com/%3Ab%3A/g/EdQWvfkpgTRJmSNRtVDfo2ABUlxROYVFU1rpeVwHkdKwdQ?e=9pmHuj) report and represent the advocacy and education members have done on behalf of current and former foster youth in Mississippi over the past several years.

## HB 1111

Establishes the County Youth Court as having original exclusive jurisdiction for all petitions for termination of parental rights, both voluntary and involuntary.

## HB 1149

Created Mississippi Department of Child Protective Services as a separate state agency from Mississippi Department of Human Services. The bill also includes these key policy changes:

* **Establishes foster youth as a party to their court hearings and guarantees them independent representation from an attorney who has undivided loyalty to the youth.**
* Establishes MDCPS as a party to the court hearings.\*
* Youth will receive a summons to all court hearings and proceedings.
* Establishes the MS Commission on Uniform Youth Court System and Procedures to review and establish unified youth court processes for all youth in the state.
* Requires Termination of Parental Rights cases to be given priority in court dockets to expedite permanency plans for youth with a TPR plan.
* Removes the house study requirement for relative or step-parent adoption of youth in foster-to-adopt cases.

## HB 1671

Speakers Commission on Life

* Increase in funds for the Children’s Promise Tax Credit from $8M to $9M (foster care agencies)
* **$10M for tax credits for Transitional Housing Organizations (Such as MFP)**
* Tax credits for Low-Income Health Care Clinics and Pregnancy Crisis Centers\*

## SB 2703

Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary in this section, the commissioner shall waive the driver's license or learner's permit fee for any applicant in the custody of the Department of Child Protection Services.

## SB 2384

There is hereby established the Mississippi Task Force on Foster Care and Adoption. Task Force will build recommendations for the agency and for the legislature. Samantha Kalahar from First Place for Youth and MS Youth Voice has been appointed by the Governor to represent lived experience on the task force.

## SB 2073

All persons eighteen (18) years of age or older, if not otherwise disqualified, or prohibited by law, shall have the capacity to enter into binding contractual relationships affecting personal property, mortgages and real property. In addition, all persons eighteen (18) years of age or older shall have the capacity to enter into binding contractual relationships for the purpose of investing in mutual funds, stocks, bonds and any other publicly traded equities. The bill allows for leasing or renting for all persons eighteen (18) years of age or older.

## HB 510

There is hereby created a Foster Parents' Bill of Rights and Responsibilities which shall be provided to all foster parents at foster parent training.\*

# Non-Legislative Policy Improvements

## Maintenance of Medicaid coverage for foster youth exiting custody:

Many Mississippi foster youth were losing their Medicaid coverage upon leaving custody due to a reporting gap between MDCPS and Medicaid. This issue has been addressed and education done with Medicaid eligibility staff, foster youth, foster parents, and other advocates to ensure youth maintain coverage to age 26.

## Expansion of HUD FYI Voucher program:

We have worked to expand the availability of the HUD Foster Youth to Independence Housing Voucher program to three regional housing authorities in the state. This provides housing options for youth who have left foster care and need housing support.