

## Governor signs executive order strengthening Fostering Connections program at CYFD

Written by gallupsun  
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SANTA FE — Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham signed an executive order strengthening the Fostering Connections program to expand services for youth who did not previously qualify on March 14.

“New Mexico has the nation’s premier Fostering Connections program, with one of the highest rates of participation in the country,” Lujan Grisham said. “By providing critical resources during a time of great transition for these youth, we see lifelong positive outcomes: they’re more likely to earn an education and less likely to experience homelessness or become incarcerated.”

Neera Tanden, President Joe Biden’s domestic policy advisor, joined the governor for the announcement at the New Mexico State Capitol.

The voluntary Fostering Connections program provides resources to young people who have “aged out” of the child welfare system. The Executive Order signed by Lujan Grisham expands the Children, Youth, and Families Department’s extended foster care support to all qualifying youth, regardless of their adjudication status.

Currently, state statute requires a court to adjudicate that a child is abused or neglected before they can receive benefits. Sometimes, children who are not abused or neglected (i.e. are voluntarily surrendered by their parents), or those who were not able to be adjudicated ahead of turning 18, may miss out on the program’s benefits.

The governor’s executive order also directs CYFD to form a working group of individuals involved in the program to prepare legislation to close this gap ahead of the 60-day session.

New Mexico’s Fostering Connections program has one of the highest rates of participation in the country, with 86% of eligible youth participating (compared with 46% nationally). Since the program started in 2019, 300 New Mexicans have enrolled.

The Biden Administration has continuously invested in children and families, including a \$9

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billion expansion to provide housing vouchers to all 20,000 youth exiting foster care annually across the U.S.

“The governor’s expansion of the Fostering Connections support today is an important step toward securing bright futures for vulnerable young people in New Mexico,” Tanden said. “This vital support for youth as they move from state care to independence is the kind of leadership that we would like to see across the nation.”

Teresa Casados, Cabinet Secretary for CYFD, spoke of all the good the Fostering Connections program has done so far.

“We have seen so many success stories through this program, including young people obtaining medical and post-graduate degrees, young people who have escaped human trafficking and are now thriving, and young people who now have established and positive relationships with other adults,” she said. “CYFD is committed to providing support for children and youth at every stage of their involvement with the Department.”

