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EDITORIAL

Foster care's future

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CALIFORNIA HAS come a long way this year in reforming foster care for more than 75,000 youths. But where do these young adults go when aid drops away at 18 years of age?

There is no housing and little support when these juveniles "emancipate" to legal adulthood. It's a problem that produces homelessness, desperation and crime. Former foster-care youths are prone to jail and life on the streets at a far greater rate than others the same age.

A solution is contained in Proposition 1C, a \$2.85 billion housing bond on the ballot next week. Within this package is \$50 million in subsidies to developers who will include housing tabbed for former foster-care youths.

These units most likely will be slipped into larger projects aimed at, say, seniors, middle- or low-income families and the disabled -- all groups hit hard by high housing costs. The idea is to integrate former foster youths into a broader world. These larger housing complexes would also be expected to offer job and educational counseling to help emancipated youths move ahead in life.

With foster care, there's a context to this story. A bipartisan push succeeded in producing eight foster-care reforms signed into law this year. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger approved the package sent to him by the Legislature. Local lawmakers, including Assemblyman Mark Leno and former state Sen. John Burton, pushed for the changes and money to help make things work. GOP legislators also played a serious role in rewriting state laws that require county and state bureaucracies to talk to each other, a major problem in the past.

The \$50 million in foster-care housing could produce 495 units, and plans call for distributing the money across the state. While the money won't entirely solve the problem of post-foster-care housing, it will make a difference in hundreds of lives.

It's another reason to boost the chances of Proposition 1C, which aims to lower housing costs for middle- and low-income residents. Vote yes on Proposition 1C.