

SENATE BILL REPORT

HB 1492

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Human Services & Corrections, March 24, 2009

Title: An act relating to the independent youth housing program.

Brief Description: Addressing the independent youth housing program.

Sponsors: Representatives Pedersen, Pettigrew, Haler, Kagi, Walsh, Darneille, Dickerson, Nelson, Moeller, Appleton, Roberts, Ormsby and Kenney.

Brief History: Passed House: 3/04/09, 92-3.

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections: 3/19/09, 3/24/09 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Hargrove, Chair; Regala, Vice Chair; Stevens, Ranking Minority Member; Carrell, Kauffman and McAuliffe.

Staff: Jennifer Strus (786-7316)

Background: The Independent Youth Housing Program (Program) was created by the Legislature in 2007 and is administered by the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED) for the purpose of providing housing stipends and case management services to youth ages 18 to 23 who have exited the state dependency system.

The Program is integrated and aligned with other state rental assistance and case management programs as well as with all existing services and programs designed to assist foster youth transition to independent living, including the Independent Living Program and the Transitional Living Program. The Program must be included in the state's Homeless Housing Strategic Plan and any other state or local homeless or affordable housing plans. The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) must collaborate with CTED to provide information about the Program to dependent youth and to refer dependent youth nearing the age of 18 to the Program. The DSHS must also provide information to CTED regarding the number of youth exiting the state dependency system eligible for state assistance and annually recommend strategies to the Legislature that may help reduce this number.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Youth eligible for the Program must be at least 18 years of age but less than 23 years; were legal dependents of the state in the month before their 18th birthday; have an income that does not exceed 50 percent of the area median income, unless they agree to participate in a matched savings for asset accumulation program (such as an Individual Development Account program); and comply with other eligibility requirements. Priority is given to youth who have been dependents of the state for at least one year.

CTED is authorized to contract with organizations to distribute housing stipends and provide housing-related services to youth. Services must include the development of an independent living plan, case management, information and referral services, and education on tenant rights and responsibilities.

Stipends must be based on factors including age, income, fair market rent for the area, and other housing and living situation variables. Stipends must be used for "independent" housing, which cannot include accommodations with, or in premises owned by, former foster parents or biological parents. Stipends are payable to landlords or other housing management.

Summary of Bill: Subcontractors participating in the Program are authorized to use Program monies to pay for professional mental health services, as well as tuition costs for court-ordered classes and programs, provided the subcontractor determines that these expenditures are necessary to assist a participating youth in accessing and maintaining independent housing.

The current Program eligibility criterion requiring that the youth must have been a dependent of the state during the month before the youth's 18th birthday is broadened to include youth who were state dependents at any time during the four-month period before their 18th birthday.

Security deposits and first and last month's rent stipends provided to a participant in the Program must be payable only to a landlord or a manager of any type of independent housing.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This bill grows out of the experiences of the Program in Pierce, Thurston, and Yakima Counties. Where the program exists, it has been very successful. For youth exiting foster care, housing has made all the difference in the world to them becoming stable and allowing them to focus on their educational and employment goals. Research done by Dr. Mark Courtney of the University of Washington provides clear evidence that programs such as the Program include a return of \$2.40 on every government dollar provided to youth exiting foster care. In Illinois where the study was

conducted, youth were 3.5 times more likely to have completed a year of college than their foster care peers who were discharged from foster care and left to their own devices. Too many foster youth who are discharged from foster care resort to risky behaviors to survive. The statistics as well as providers' experience shows that youth need support as they transition from foster care to living on their own. The Program is an important program and if the youth exiting foster care did not have this program, it is unclear where some of them would be. Many have no biological family members to fall back on.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Pederson, prime sponsor; Jim Theofelis, Mockingbird Society; Maureen McLemore, Community Youth Services; John Seals, Jennifer Huerta, youth.