

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6101

As of January 23, 2014

Title: An act relating to extended foster care services.

Brief Description: Concerning extended foster care services.

Sponsors: Senators Fain, Darneille, Litzow, Kohl-Welles, Billig, Rivers, Hobbs, O'Ban, Pearson, Pedersen, McAuliffe and Kline.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections: 1/20/14.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Staff: Joan Miller (786-7784)

Background: In October 2008, Congress passed the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008. One of the key provisions of the legislation allowed states to use foster care funds to provide extended foster care services to youth between the ages of 18 and 21 who engaged in certain qualifying activities.

In 2011 the Legislature established extended foster care services, which are defined as residential and other support services that the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) is authorized to provide to foster children. A youth was eligible for extended foster care services until age 21 only while participating in a secondary education program or a secondary education equivalency program. In 2012 the Legislature expanded the eligibility to include youth who were enrolled, or had applied for and demonstrated intent to enroll, in a postsecondary academic or vocational program. In 2013 the Legislature again expanded the eligibility to include youth who were participating in a program or activity designed to promote or remove barriers to employment.

The court must dismiss dependency cases of foster care youth who turn 18 years old if they are not participating in one of the qualifying activities. Youth whose dependency cases were dismissed at age 18 or after may request extended foster care services through a Voluntary Placement Agreement (VPA) if they request services before turning 19 years old. A youth may enter into a VPA only once but may transition among eligibility categories, so long as the youth remains eligible during the transition.

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.

When the youth is at least 17 years of age but not older than 17 years and six months, DSHS must provide the youth with written documentation explaining the availability of extended foster care services and detailing instructions about how to access those services after they reach age 18.

DSHS is relieved of any supervisory duties over a youth who is age 18 but has not requested extended foster care services. While a youth receives extended foster care services, the youth is under the care and placement authority of DSHS.

Summary of Bill: Youth who have an open dependency proceeding upon turning age 18 are eligible for extended foster care services if they are engaged in employment for 80 hours or more per month or if they are not able to engage in any of the qualifying activities due to a documented medical condition.

For the purposes of qualifying for extended foster care services, a medical condition means a short-term or long-term physical or mental health condition as verified and documented by any licensed health care provider.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 15, 2014.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on March 1, 2015.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The foster care system across the country is known for being a major contributor to homelessness, but this bill is one of the fixes to that. This bill enables youth to get a college degree instead of sending them into homelessness, which is a sentence to public assistance and a life of underachievement. Stakeholders are working on bringing the fiscal note down. Two million dollars is a good chunk of change, but it does not compare to what this bill will bring back in savings of incarceration and teen parenting. Because of extended foster care, youth are going to college, paying taxes, and becoming full-fledged citizens. One testifier has been in extended foster care for over a year. It has provided her with a safe living environment where she can continue her high school education and be able to move into the dorms next year to start her studies at Evergreen State College. Knowing she has a safe place to stay allows her to focus on her education and pursue her goal of becoming a nurse in the Navy. Many of her friends exited the foster care system with mental disabilities, and they do not have the same opportunity to be in extended foster care because of their mental state. Most people with mental disabilities need someone to take care of them or have services to help them. She also thinks that youth who work part time should have extended foster care, so youth who do beat the odds and are able to get a job do not lose their housing because of it.

OTHER: Children's Administration is neutral on the bill except that it has a significant fiscal impact. Preliminary impact for fiscal year 2015 is \$2.1 million, and it goes up from there. The Office of the Family & Children's Ombuds remains neutral but supports the intent of this bill. By providing basic services to assist foster youth to successfully transition into

adulthood, we can help prevent negative outcomes for youth exiting foster care. Studies of youth who leave foster care without a safe, permanent home reveal that over half of them experienced homelessness. Nearly 30 percent were incarcerated at some point. Parents support and encourage their children's career ambitions and provide basic assistance while they gain education or work experience. The state should provide equal support for our foster youth.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Jim Theofelis, Mockingbird Society; Crystal Jones, Olympia Mockingbird Chapter.

OTHER: Jennifer Strus, Children's Administration, DSHS; Patrick Dowd, Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds.