

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1867

As Reported by House Committee On:
Early Learning & Human Services

Title: An act relating to improving transitions in extended foster care to increase housing stability for foster youth.

Brief Description: Improving transitions in extended foster care to increase housing stability for foster youth.

Sponsors: Representatives Fey, Stambaugh, Senn, Kagi, Kilduff, Appleton, Graves, Hudgins, Orwall, Ryu, Sells, Stanford, Robinson, McDonald, Ortiz-Self, Doglio, Slatter, Tharinger and Ormsby.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Early Learning & Human Services: 2/14/17, 2/15/17 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Allows eligible youth to unenroll and reenroll in the extended foster care program an unlimited number of times between ages 18 and 21.
- Requires the Washington State Institute for Public Policy to conduct a study related to extended foster care and issue a preliminary report by December 1, 2018, and a final report by December 1, 2019.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & HUMAN SERVICES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Senn, Vice Chair; Dent, Ranking Minority Member; McDonald, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Frame, Goodman, Griffey, Kilduff, Klippert, Lovick, McCaslin, Muri and Ortiz-Self.

Staff: Luke Wickham (786-7146).

Background:

Extended Foster Care Program.

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.

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) operates the extended foster care program which allows individuals who are dependent in foster care at age 18 to receive services if that youth is:

- enrolled in a secondary education program or equivalent program;
- enrolled and participating in a postsecondary academic or postsecondary vocational program, or has applied for and can demonstrate an intention to timely enroll in a postsecondary academic or vocational program;
- participating in a program or activity designed to promote employment or remove barriers to employment;
- engaged in employment for 80 or more hours per month; or
- not able to engage in the above activities due to a documented medical condition.

For eligible youth that choose to participate in the extended foster care program on his or her eighteenth birthday, the dependency court action will continue. Eligible youth may choose to participate in the extended foster care after his or her eighteenth birthday and until the youth turns 19 years old through a voluntary placement agreement with the DSHS.

The services that youth may receive through the extended foster care program include:

- foster care placement or supervised independent living setting placement;
- medical (including mental health);
- dental;
- independent living skills;
- case management through the DSHS; and
- referrals to community resources.

In October 2016 there were 569 youth receiving extended foster care services.

Summary of Bill:

The DSHS must allow youth who have received extended foster care services to reenter the program through a voluntary placement agreement when he or she meets the criteria again. Individuals who are eligible for extended foster care services may unenroll and reenroll in extended foster care an unlimited number of times between ages 18 and 21.

The Washington Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) shall conduct a study measuring the outcomes for youth who have received extended foster care services. The study shall include: (1) measurements of any savings; (2) an outcome comparison for youth who have received extended foster care and those who aged out of foster care; and (3) a comparison of other state extended foster care programs. The WSIPP shall issue a report containing its preliminary findings to the Legislature by December 1, 2018, and a final report by December 1, 2019.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 7, 2017.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Extended foster care should be extended to more youth. Many youth who are homeless could be served by the extended foster care program. Because extended foster care has been offered for a long time, it makes sense to do a study on this program. It is emotionally disturbing for a youth to leave extended foster care without the ability return. Without these services, many youth are forced into homelessness.

Of the approximately 500 youth who age out of foster care, only about a third enter extended foster care. This bill eliminates one of barriers that youth experience in entering extended foster care. Extended foster care provides a safety net for foster youth transitioning from foster care into independence. It is important to allow youth to make mistakes. Federal law allows states to reenter up to the maximum age allowed by a state for extended foster care. There are 15 states that allow youth to unenroll and reenroll an unlimited number of times. The circumstances of youth change, and this bill allows for flexibility to meet the changing needs of youth. According to a DSHS study, approximately 36 percent of foster youth experience homelessness within one year of leaving foster care.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Fey, prime sponsor; Mary Van Cleve, Columbia Legal Services; Annie Blackledge, The Mockingbird Society; and Seth Dawson, Washington Association for Children and Families.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.