

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5082

As of January 13, 2025

Title: An act relating to creating a housing assistance program for youth enrolled in extended foster care.

Brief Description: Creating a housing assistance program for youth enrolled in extended foster care.

Sponsors: Senators Wilson, C., Bateman, Cleveland, Cortes, Frame, Hasegawa, Krishnadasan, Lias, Lovelett, Nobles, Orwall, Salomon, Trudeau, Valdez and Wellman.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services: 1/13/25.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Creates the Extended Foster Care Housing Program in the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF).
- Establishes that eligibility standards include being a youth receiving extended foster care services and being homeless or at-risk of homelessness.
- Directs DCYF to conduct a transition planning process with youth enrolled in extended foster care at least three months prior to their 21st birthday to plan for the youth's future housing needs.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Staff: Alison Mendiola (786-7488)

Background: Extended Foster Care. Extended Foster Care (EFC) in the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) provides an opportunity for young adults who were a dependent of Washington State at age 18, to voluntarily agree to continue receiving foster

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care services, including placement services until their 21st birthday. The dependency action continues while the youth receives EFC services.

EFC services includes residential and other support services DCYF is authorized to provide. Services may include, but are not limited to, placement in a licensed, relative, or otherwise approved care, or supervised independent living settings; assistance in meeting basic needs; independent living services; medical assistance; and counseling or treatment. A youth who is not in a licensed foster care placement is eligible for a monthly supervised independent living subsidy which is effective the date the youth signs the voluntary placement agreement, agrees to dependency, or informs their social worker they are living independently, whichever occurs first. If a youth is not living in an approved supervised independent living setting, DCYF is to work with the youth to help identify an appropriate living arrangement until the youth is living in a safe location approved by DCYF or the court, and during this time DCYF continues to pay the monthly supervised independent living subsidy.

DCYF is to seek federal reimbursement when a youth is:

- enrolled in high school or a high school equivalency program;
- enrolled, applied for, or can show intent to timely enroll in a post-secondary academic or post-secondary vocational certification program;
- participating in a program or activity designed to promote or remove barriers to employment, including part-time employment;
- employed 80 hours or more a month; or
- is unable to engage in any of these activities due to a documented medical condition.

Foster Youth to Independence Program. The Foster Youth to Independence Program (FYI) provides youth with up to 36 months of housing assistance and support services to assist on their path to independence. Youth participating in FYI receive a Housing Choice Voucher.

Through the Housing Choice Voucher Program, formerly known as Section 8, housing authorities provide rental assistance for people with low incomes to rent from landlords. Participants in the program receive a housing subsidy in the form of a voucher that they can use to rent a unit from any landlord who meets the voucher requirements. A participant must earn 50 percent or less of the area median income (AMI) to qualify and pay the portion of the rent and utilities not covered by the voucher, typically 30 to 40 percent of their monthly income. Preference is given to households at 30 percent or less of AMI and those who are homeless.

Youth eligibility requirements for FYI vouchers:

- were in foster care at some point between their 16th and 18th birthday;
- are between the ages of 18-24;
- have left foster care or will leave foster care within 90 days; and
- are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

Summary of Bill: The Extended Foster Care Housing Program (program) is established within DCYF to provide rental assistance and associated housing fees to eligible youth. Youth are eligible for the program if they are receiving foster care services and are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of experiencing homelessness. DCYF is to ensure that all eligible youth receive access to rental housing assistance.

Rental assistance is to be provided to eligible youth based on the following criteria:

- rental assistance is provided for up to 36 months, not to exceed a youth's 21st birthday;
- the amount of rental assistance must be based on fair market rent in the youth's location;
- youth shall pay no more than 30 percent of their adjusted gross income toward rent, including the extended foster care subsidy; and
- if the youth's rent and utilities exceed the fair market rent for that location, the youth's contribution is not to exceed 40 percent of their monthly adjusted income, including the extended foster care subsidy.

DCYF shall:

- ensure that all eligible youth receive access to rental housing assistance;
- collect data on the housing status of youth in extended foster care on an annual basis;
- conduct a transition planning process with youth enrolled in extended foster care at least three months prior to that youth's 21st birthday; and
- conduct a competitive procurement process to identify an entity or entities to contract for the operation of the program:
 1. if no entity or entities are available to operate the program or specific parts of the program, DCYF may operate the program or the specific parts not operated by an outside entity; and
 2. the entity or entities must have a demonstrated understanding of the importance of stable housing for youth involved in the child welfare system.

The transition planning process is to include, but is not limited to:

- assessing the youth's continued housing and financial stability;
- supporting the youth to apply to a federally funded housing voucher program when available, and if applicable;
- providing referrals to housing assistance; and
- providing referrals to benefits and services that support the financial stability of the youth including education, employment, physical and behavioral health care, and other available public benefits.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: In 2011, EFC was established. In fiscal year 2024, 13 percent of youth in EFC were homeless. This bill builds on work done in EFC to ensure the youth have the resources they need to be successful. Federal restrictions prevent a youth to receive both an EFC subsidy and a housing subsidy through the federal FYI program, forcing youth to choose between EFC supports or housing stability. This bill would ensure housing stability for youth in state care as they launch into adulthood and independent living. The current EFC subsidy of \$861 is not sufficient to cover housing and living expenses. Without the additional support this bill would provide, youth in EFC have constant stress about stable housing, effecting their mental health when they already have experienced so much trauma not to mention homelessness disproportionality impacts Black and brown youth. If a youth is dependent on the state, they need to know they can depend on the state. Despite the budget situation the state is facing, this challenge needs to be thought of differently as we're talking about youth in the state's care. We have a legal and constitutional obligation to make sure they have a roof over their heads.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Claire Wilson, Prime Sponsor; Charles Smith, The Mockingbird Society; Lexx Senner, The Mockingbird Society; Corrina Chatterton, The Mockingbird Society; Esmina James-Secret, The Mockingbird Society; Tara Urs, King County Department of Public Defense; Jonas Rios, The Mockingbird Society; Rocket Garcia, The Mockingbird Society; Jalayna Ruland, The Mockingbird Society.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.