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**Early Learning & Children's  
Services Committee**

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**ESSB 5909**

**Brief Description:** Supporting the needs of children who have been in foster care.

**Sponsors:** Senate Committee on Human Services & Corrections (originally sponsored by Senators Rasmussen, Roach, Regala, Eide, McAuliffe, Kilmer, Hargrove, Kastama, Tom, Shin, Kohl-Welles, Stevens, Carrell, Franklin and Kline).

**Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill**

- Directs the Family Policy Council to review programs serving adolescents in foster care and youth who have transitioned out of foster care.
- Directs the DSHS to establish a pilot program for foster youth community coordinators to assist youth who are transitioning from foster care to independent living.
- Authorizes the DSHS to enter into time-limited voluntary foster placement agreements with former foster youth and to provide assistance with an independent living plans.

**Hearing Date:** 3/27/07

**Staff:** Sydney Forrester (786-7120).

**Background:**

Foster Care Services Beyond Age 18

In general, most foster care benefits are available to children through the age of 18. There are, however, a few exceptions where youth can receive services or remain in a foster care placement beyond the age of 18. For example, a child may remain in a foster care placement up until the age of 19 years for the purpose of completing high school or equivalent training. In this case, the youth continues to qualify for title IV-E federal funding under the Social Security Act.

As a result of the enactment of HB 2002 in the 2006 legislative session, up to 50 foster youth per year may be allowed to remain in their foster care placements until age 21 for the purpose of

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completing a post-secondary educational or vocational program. In this case, the youth does not qualify for title IV-E funding, but may be eligible for Medicaid coverage up to the age of 19.

Youth between the ages of 18 and 21 who were formerly in foster care also may be eligible to receive independent living skills (ILS) services or transitional services if they meet certain criteria. These services can include supports relating to housing, counseling, employment, education, or other appropriate services to complement the youth's own efforts to achieve self-sufficiency. These services may be funded by the state, by Medicaid, or by other federal money under the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program.

#### The Family Policy Council

In 1992 the Legislature created the Family Policy Council (Council) to design and carry out principle-centered, systemic reforms to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families. One of the Council's main activities is working with the state's Community Public Health and Safety Networks to prevent important social problems such as child abuse and youth substance abuse. These networks are community-based, volunteer boards, developed to give local communities more autonomy and resources to help improve the lives of children and families in their communities, and to provide recommendations for policy changes to improve state and local child and family service systems.

#### **Summary of Bill:**

##### Foster Care Services Beyond Age 18

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) is authorized to allow up to 50 youth to remain in foster care past the age of 18 for the purpose of receiving independent living skills training. Within funding specifically appropriated for such purpose, the DSHS also is directed to work with foster youth who are aging-out of foster care to develop independent living plans. Assistance with independent living plans may include financial assistance in the form of vouchers to pay for:

- (1) first month's rent;
- (2) security deposit; and
- (3) incidental items.

Services to youth who have exited foster care at the age of 18 are declared:

- (1) not to create an entitlement to services;
- (2) not to create judicial authority to extend jurisdiction of the juvenile court to youth 18 years and older; and
- (3) not to create a private right of action or claim against the DSHS or its contracted providers.

#### The Family Policy Council

The Council is directed to review programs providing services to adolescents in foster care and to youth who have aged-out of the foster care system.

##### Foster Youth Community Coordinator Pilot Program

After the Council completes its review of programs serving adolescent foster youth and youth who have aged-out of foster care, the DSHS must establish a foster youth community coordinator in three regional offices to provide assistance to foster youth who are aging out of the system. The DSHS must select two of the pilot sites by September 1, 2007. The community coordinator will be responsible for:

- (1) facilitating collaboration among organizations serving foster youth who age out of care, and between the DSHS and these organizations;
- (2) facilitating training of entities providing services to transitioning youth; and
- (3) improving communications to foster youth regarding services and programs available to assist them in preparing for independent living.

The program must include measurable objectives for evaluation and the DSHS must report to the Legislature by January 1, 2009, regarding the evaluation of the program, including whether the objectives have been met.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on March 16, 2007.

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