

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1492

As Passed House:

March 4, 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:

Committee Activity:

Local Government & Housing: 2/4/09, 2/9/09 [DP];

General Government Appropriations: 2/17/09, 2/19/09 [DP].

Floor Activity

Passed House: 3/4/09, 92-3.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Authorizes subcontractors participating in the Independent Youth Housing Program (Program) 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 participating youth in accessing and maintaining independent housing.
- Broadens the definition of "eligible youth" under the requirements of the Program.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT & HOUSING

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Simpson, Chair; Nelson, Vice Chair; Angel, Ranking Minority Member; Cox, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Miloscia, Short, Springer, Upthegrove and White.

Staff: Thamas Osborn (786-7129)

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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Darneille, Chair; Takko, Vice Chair; McCune, Ranking Minority Member; Armstrong, Blake, Dunshee, Hudgins, Kenney, Pedersen, Short, Van De Wege and Williams.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Hinkle, Assistant Ranking Minority Member.

Staff: Steve Smith (786-7178)

Background:

Overview of the Independent Youth Housing Program.

Created by the Legislature in 2007, the Independent Youth Housing Program (Program) is administered by the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (DCTED) for the purpose of providing housing stipends and case management services to youth ages 18 to 23 who have exited the state dependency system. In creating the Program, the Legislature identified two primary goals:

- ensuring that all youth exiting the state dependency system have a decent, appropriate, and affordable home in a healthy, safe environment to prevent these youth from experiencing homelessness; and
- reducing the percentage of young people eligible for state assistance upon exiting 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 the DCTED 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 the DCTED 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.

Eligible Youth.

Eligible youth are defined to include those who:

- are at least 18 years of age but less than 23 years;
- were legal dependents of the state in the month before his or her 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.

Program Administration.

The DCTED 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.

The DCTED must establish a formula to determine the amounts of the housing stipends. 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.

Evaluation and Reporting Requirements.

The DCTED must include a program report in the state's Homeless Housing Strategic Plan and any other relevant state and local plans. These reports must include annual evaluations of subcontractor organizations and specific performance measures.

The Washington State Institute for Public Policy is required to measure the outcomes for youth participating in the Program and issue a final report to the Legislature by December 2010.

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 his or her 18th birthday is broadened to include youth who were state dependents at any time during the *four-month* period before his or her 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.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Local Government & Housing):

(In support) This bill represents part of the 30-year continuum of the State's efforts to grapple with the problem of youth who are making the transition from foster care to independence. By providing additional care and services to those foster children who have reached the age of 18, the bill takes an important step towards strengthening the human services "safety net." Without the additional protections provided by this bill, many more young people leaving the foster care system will face homelessness. Being a foster child is difficult as it is and such children are already at a huge disadvantage with respect to obtaining the life skills necessary to get good jobs and a decent education. Providing housing to children leaving foster care has already had a profound, beneficial effect with respect to the numbers of such children continuing their educations and finding a place in society. This legislation ensures that greater numbers of children will have homes upon leaving the foster care system and, if necessary, will enable them to obtain mental health services as well. Most foster children are not prepared for independence at age 18, insofar as they do not have any financial resources, family support, or housing. Accordingly, far too many end up being street kids who suffer due to the lack of resources necessary to cushion the transition. This bill strengthens a housing program that has shown remarkable success and adds needed mental health services as well.

(Opposed) None.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (General Government Appropriations):

This bill is one small step towards addressing homelessness around the state by looking at a specific population of youth that are aging out of foster care. There has been some great success with the three authorized nonprofit providers working with the program; however, there have been barriers, particularly in recruiting youth in Yakima, where youth were required to age out in the month before their eighteenth birthday. The other barrier has been that some youth would not be able to obtain housing without cleared records. This was a problem because some youth had court-ordered tuition for classes that were necessary for their juvenile records to be cleared. The bill addresses both of these problems. Both changes are small changes that should have no fiscal impacts, and the bill should help make the program become more efficient over time.

The bill had two main goals: (1) to reduce homelessness among youth exiting the foster care system; and (2), to reduce the percentage of youth that rely on public assistance. There is a major Midwest study that indicates that youth who receive safe housing tend to have fewer negative outcomes, such as early parenting, while increasing positive outcomes, such as higher educational achievement and employment. This bill does provide fiscal support and savings. The University of Washington is currently working on a cost/benefit analysis of youth aging out of foster care that is expected to indicate that these types of programs save money. The federal government passed legislation modeled after work in Washington state to provide safe housing for youth exiting foster care. Starting in 2010, this program and others like it will be eligible for a federal match.

Early in the 2009 legislative session, the DCTED projected that in 2009 alone there will be 15,000 additional homeless people in Washington. In addition, because recording fees used to fund homelessness programs are decreasing, the state will be able to serve about 5,000 fewer people in 2009 alone, not taking into account the increases in homelessness if the GAU (General Assistance Unemployable) program is eliminated, other state funding reductions, or the likely reduction in private contributions.

Persons Testifying (Local Government & Housing): Representative Pedersen, prime sponsor; John Seals, Pierce County Alliance; Alexandria Smith and Maureen McLemore, Community Youth Services; Jim Theofelus, Mockingbird Society; Melinda Giovengo, Youthcare; and Seth Dawson, Washington State Coalition for the Homeless.

Persons Testifying (General Government Appropriations): (In support) Representative Pedersen, prime sponsor; Jim Theofellis, Mockingbird Society; and Seth Dawson, Washington State Coalition for the Homeless.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Local Government & Housing): None.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (General Government Appropriations): None.