

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5566

As of January 11, 2022

Title: An act relating to expanding eligibility for the independent youth housing program.

Brief Description: Expanding eligibility for the independent youth housing program.

Sponsors: Senators Kuderer, Lovelett, Das, Dhingra, Fortunato, Nguyen, Saldaña and Wilson, C.; by request of Department of Commerce.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Housing & Local Government: 1/11/22.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Expands eligibility under the Independent Youth Housing Program to include formerly dependent youth up to age 25 and youth receiving extended foster care services.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING & LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Staff: Brandon Popovac

Background: Office of Homeless Youth. In 2015, the Legislature created the Office of Homeless Youth Prevention and Protection Programs (OHY) within the Department of Commerce. OHY provides services for youth and young adults, including through the Independent Youth Housing Program (IYHP), street youth services, HOPE Centers, and crisis residential centers.

Independent Youth Housing Program. Created by the Legislature in 2007, IYHP provides rental assistance and case management services, through five contracted agencies located throughout the state, to eligible youth who have aged out of the Washington State foster care system. IYHP goals are to ensure all youth exiting the state dependency system have a decent, appropriate, and affordable home in a healthy, safe environment to prevent youth

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from experiencing homelessness, and to reduce the percentage of young people eligible for state assistance upon exiting the state dependency system.

Foster youth are eligible under the program if they are 18 years of age or older, were a dependent of the state within four months of their 18th birthday, have not yet reached the age of 23, and are a Washington resident. Priority under IYHP is given to youth who were dependents of the state for at least one year. Youth participating in extended foster care are only eligible to receive IYHP services once they exit extended foster care.

Youth may receive the following services under IYHP:

- monthly rent;
- utility payments, such as gas and electricity;
- move-in costs, such as first and last month's rent or security deposits;
- costs for credit checks; or
- costs for parking, if not included in rent.

Other IYHP requirements include:

- participation in case management;
- sources of income verification;
- working on independent living goals;
- contributing up to 30 percent of their income to help pay for rent; and
- participation in an individual development account or other savings plan, if income exceeds 50 percent of area median income.

Extended Foster Care. The extended foster care (EFC) program provides an opportunity for youth who were a dependent of Washington State at age 18 to voluntarily agree to continue receiving foster care services, including placement services, while working on their goals towards independence.

The youth's dependency action will continue if they elect to participate in the program on their 18th birthday. Eligible youth who do not elect to participate in the EFC program on their 18th birthday will have until their 21st birthday to voluntarily request to participate in the EFC program. Eligible youth may enter and exit the program as needed between the ages of 18 and 21 years old.

EFC services may include:

- foster care placement or supervised independent living setting placement;
- medical, including mental health, and dental services;
- transitional living services, if available;
- case management; or
- referrals to community resources, as appropriate.

Summary of Bill: Eligibility requirements under IYHP are expanded to include youth who were formerly dependent at any time before their 18th birthday and up to the age of 25, and

youth who are also receiving extended foster care services.

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: Research supports that foster care and homelessness are linked. The bill is intended to prevent further homelessness, ensure access to safe and stable housing, and provide stability for foster youth to focus on their education, maintain a job, and thrive in adulthood. Some foster youth have nowhere to go after services end even after reunification or adoption, especially failed adoptions. Failed adoptions of young adults are unfortunate, especially when entering young adulthood. Service providers struggle to find resources needed for foster youth. There is a constant threat of discontinuation of support, which is not unique to foster youth. Young adults navigating resources encounter little options, especially around housing, when support is needed. One in three youth who are in foster care in Washington experience housing instability within one year of removal from services. The bill represents an important strategy for the state to meet its goal of preventing youth from exiting public systems of care into homelessness and into safe and stable housing. IYHP is a beacon of success and hope for all dependent youth experiencing homelessness. All systems designed to help youth have led to detriments in housing stability, including foster care, juvenile justice, and behavioral health systems. Changes to eligibility align with other OHY programs. Families often reunify more often if young adults are able to thrive, become more mature, and learn other life skills. Rental assistance provided under IYHP helps foster youth with burden of paying high rental rates in current market and to build up a strong rental history. Allowing youth receiving EFC services to enter IYHP prevents them having to decide between the two programs, including preventing a loss of state social worker supports. Some youth do not have strong connections with their biological family, making the transition to adulthood difficult to navigate. Medicaid funding cannot be used to cover rent and other services covered by IYHP. IYHP provides basic skills necessary to manage adult life, specifically including individualized case management, access to housing specialists, and help with money management and preemployment skills. Many foster youth choose EFC services and its stipend over IYHP services. The bill eliminates unnecessary limitations as young adults are shouldering the biggest burdens of the pandemic, especially with housing security.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Patty Kuderer, Prime Sponsor; Jim Theofelis, NorthStar Advocates; Kim Justice, Office of Homeless Youth, Dept. of Commerce; Claire Calvert, YMCA Social Impact Center; Marissa Ingalls, Coordinated Care of Washington; Taylor Campbell; Sara Mack, Volunteers of America; Emily Stochel, The Mockingbird Society;

Samuel Martin, A Way Home Washington; Julie Patiño, A Way Home Washington.

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