

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2002

As Reported by House Committee On:

Children & Family Services

Appropriations

Title: An act relating to authorizing continuing foster care and support services to age twenty-one to youths who are in state-supervised foster care on their eighteenth birthday.

Brief Description: Authorizing limited continuing foster care and support services up to age twenty-one.

Sponsors: Representatives Dickerson, Roberts, Kagi, Kenney and Santos.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Children & Family Services: 1/16/06, 1/19/06 [DPS];

Appropriations: 3/31/06, 2/1/06 [DP2S(w/o sub CFS)].

Brief Summary of Second Substitute Bill

- Extends foster care or group care until the youth turns 21 years of age, for up to 50 youth per year for three years.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Roberts, Vice Chair; Walsh, Ranking Minority Member; Hinkle, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Darneille, Dickerson, Haler and Pettigrew.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Dunn.

Staff: Sonja Hallum (786-7092).

Background:

If there are allegations of abandonment, abuse or neglect, or no parent who is capable of caring for a child, the state may investigate the allegations and initiate a dependency proceeding in juvenile court. If the court finds the statutory requirements have been met, the court will find the child to be a dependent of the state.

Whenever the court finds a child to be a dependent child, the court will enter a dispositional plan for the case which will include an order for the placement of the child either within the

home or outside of the home. If the child is placed outside the home, he or she may be placed with a relative or in non-relative foster care.

A child may remain in foster care until the age of 18. However, a youth may be permitted to remain in foster care or group care through age 20 to enable the youth to complete his or her high school or vocational school program.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The short title of the bill is the "Foster Youth Achievement Act."

Beginning in 2006, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) is granted authority to allow up to 50 youth reaching 18 years of age to continue in foster care or group care as needed to participate in or complete a post-high school academic or vocational program, and to receive necessary support and transition services. In 2007 and 2008, 50 additional youth per year may be permitted to continue to remain in foster or group care after reaching the age of 18. A youth who remains eligible for such placement and services pursuant to DSHS rules may continue in foster care or group care until the youth reaches his or her 21st birthday.

The bill states that nothing in the bill should be construed as creating any of the following:

1. an entitlement to services;
2. judicial authority to extend the jurisdiction of Juvenile Court under a dependency proceeding to a youth who has turned 18 years of age or to order the provision of services to the youth; or
3. a private right of action or claim on the part of any individual, entity, or agency against the DSHS or any contractor of the DSHS.

The bill also authorizes the DSHS to adopt rules establishing eligibility for independent living services and placement for youths pursuant to the bill.

The Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) is required to conduct a study on the outcomes for foster youth who receive continued support, as well as any savings to the state. The WSIPP is permitted to receive non-state funding to conduct the study.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill limits the number of youth who may continue in foster or group care after reaching the age of 18 to 50 youth per year for three years. The youth must be in a post-high school educational or vocational program to be eligible to remain in care.

The substitute adds the requirement that the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) conduct a study on the outcomes for foster youth who receive continued support, as well as any savings to the state and permits WSIPP to receive non-state funding to conduct the study.

Finally, the substitute provides a short title for the bill titling the bill the "Foster Youth Achievement Act."

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: (In support of original bill) When a youth from an intact family graduates, he or she receives a party, a computer, or a car. When foster youth turn 18 and receive a diploma, they lose their housing, support, and medical assistance as a reward. Less than 50 percent of kids aging out of foster care graduate from high school or get a GED compared to 85 percent of the general population. Six to 12 months after exiting foster care, foster youth have a higher rate of public assistance, depression, pregnancy, arrest, homelessness and one-quarter suffer post-traumatic stress syndrome. This is more than the number of veterans returning from war. The costs are minimal compared to the gains. We will see savings in criminal justice, human services, and savings in youth who lose their lives. As a part of the Braam settlement, the state made promises to make changes to support youth up to age 21. This bill fulfills this agreement. It tells kids to keep trying and we will continue to support you. The state has a duty to these kids because the state has taken the kids from their families and said the state will be their parent. Other states provide support for foster youth up to age 21. There is interest from the private sector in funding the WSIPP study.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: (In support of original bill) Representative Dickerson, prime sponsor; Casey Trupin, Columbia Legal Services; Jim Theofelis, Courtney Konietzko, Jamica Henderson, Cassandra Davis, and Misty Lou Cook, Mockingbird Society; Daniele Baxter, Foster Parent Association; Joe West and Larry Sanders, Foster Youth; Rob Credle and Janis Avery, Treehouse; Ken Kirsch; Maureen McLemore, Community Youth Services; Helen Myrick, Greater Pierce County Community Network; Bill Block, Committee to End Homelessness in King County; Nani Jackins Park, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Jana Heyd, Society of Counsel; Kelly Land, Friends of Youth; and Diana Pearce, University of Washington.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The second substitute bill be substituted therefor and the second substitute bill do pass and do not pass the substitute bill by Committee on Children & Family Services. Signed by 30 members: Representatives Sommers, Chair; Fromhold, Vice Chair; Alexander, Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; McDonald, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bailey, Buri, Chandler, Clements, Cody, Conway, Darneille, Dunshee, Grant, Haigh, Hinkle, Hunter, Kagi, Kenney, Kessler, Linville,

McDermott, McIntire, Miloscia, Pearson, Priest, Schual-Berke, P. Sullivan, Talcott and Walsh.

Staff: Amy Skei (786-7140).

Summary of Recommendation of Committee On Appropriations Compared to Recommendation of Committee On Children & Family Services:

The Appropriations Committee modified the bill's Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) study to make conducting the study contingent on approval by the WSIPP board.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: This bill addresses a serious need. Current state law provides that when a foster youth receives a high school diploma or GED and turns 18, he or she is rewarded for getting that GED by losing housing and state support. We feel this is not only fiscally wrong, but also morally and socially wrong. Approximately 300-400 youth age-out of foster care each year, and 25-35 percent do so with a diploma. These youth have demonstrated willingness to work hard and persevere under difficult circumstances. Recent research by Casey Family Programs shows that older foster youth who exit foster care have horrendous outcomes. One-third end up on public assistance within 18 months, they experience early parenting, and they experience rates of post-traumatic stress disorder at twice the rate of war veterans. This bill would pay foster parents' their reimbursement rate and the youth would keep their medical benefits. The evaluation component of this bill is important. We want to make sure these efforts are effective, and we expect the cost-benefit analysis will clearly show cost savings. This bill will invest in a minimal way now and avoid significant cost impact in the future. Our state currently has a significant labor shortage, and our corporations are dedicated to hiring these kids once they get trained and get the needed life skills.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Dickerson, prime sponsor; Dennis Eagle, Washington Federation of State Employees; Jim Theofelis, Mockingbird Society; and Ken Kirsch.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.