

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6324

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Human Services & Corrections, January 31, 2006

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

Brief Description: Expanding foster care and support services provisions.

Sponsors: Senators Regala, Schmidt, Thibaudeau, Stevens, Brown, Eide, Franklin, Pridemore, Keiser, Rasmussen, Fairley, Rockefeller, Jacobsen, Kohl-Welles, McAuliffe and Roach.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections: 1/24/06, 1/31/06 [DPS-WM, w/oRec].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6324 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Hargrove, Chair; Regala, Vice Chair; Stevens, Ranking Minority Member; Brandland, McAuliffe and Thibaudeau.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senator Carrell.

Staff: Indu Thomas (786-7459)

Background: Children may be placed in out-of-home care as a result of abuse, neglect, abandonment, or family conflict. If and when children become dependents of the state, they remain state dependents until they move to a permanent placement or until they reach 18 years of age.

Currently, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) provides child welfare services to these children. DSHS is granted the authority to extend foster care or group care for individuals from 18 through 20 years of age to enable them to complete a high school or vocational school program.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The bill extends the provision allowing children to remain in foster care until the age of 21 while pursuing post-secondary education so long as they maintain a 2.5 grade point average and remain enrolled in school. The number of students who are eligible is limited to 50 students per year. The bill also limits child support obligations for parents of young adults, aged 18 - 21, who chose to remain in foster care.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The substitute adds a 50 student per year limit. The substitute bill also requires that students maintain a 2.5 grade point average and remain

enrolled in school to be eligible to remain in foster care. A provision limiting child support obligations is added.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 18, 2006.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Testimony For: The current situation is that each year approximately 350-400 youth "age out" or leave the Washington foster care system, as they have turned eighteen. The statistics and studies that have been conducted on these children show that these children do not do as well as their counterparts from intact families. These children are ill-prepared for independent living. One third of them end up on public assistance and nearly a quarter of foster children become homeless upon leaving care. A quarter of these young people suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, which is twice the rate of occurrence of this same mental disorder in veterans. The current situation puts treatment providers in the position of having to counsel young adults in foster care to postpone the completion of high-school or a graduation equivalency diploma program in order to remain in a foster care home.

The current system is the equivalent of a parent who pushes their child out of the home just because they have turned 18. The current system rewards under-achievement and punishes achievement. This bill creates an incentive system that encourages achievement. Young adults are only permitted to stay in foster care if they are able to gain admission to college and must stay in college to continue to receive this assistance. These young adults are still responsible for the cost of tuition. The state would provide young adults who were in the foster care system an opportunity to attend school without balancing the need to work full time to afford the cost of food and housing. This support would permit young adults to stay in school and improve their opportunities to eventually get jobs that pay a livable wage.

Concern about the fiscal impact of this bill could be addressed by limiting the number of children eligible to participate in the program.

Testimony Against: None.

Who Testified: PRO: Jim Theopelis, Misty Lou Cook, and Maleka Taylor, Mockingbird Society; Tim Bell, Passion to Action; Sandy Rosenkrantz and Michael George, Citizens; Holly Hill and James Avery, Treehouse; Rev. Sanford Brown, Church Council of Greater Seattle and Commission to End Homelessness.