

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESSB 5909

As Reported by House Committee On:
Early Learning & Children's Services

Title: An act relating to supporting the needs of children who have been in foster care.

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 History:

Committee Activity:

Early Learning & Children's Services: 3/27/07, 3/29/07 [DPA].

**Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill
(As Amended by House Committee)**

- Directs the Family Policy Council to conduct a survey and report back to the Legislature regarding statewide service needs and gaps for transitional and independent living services for foster youth and former foster youth.
- Directs the Department of Social and Health Services to enhance and expand transitional and independent living services by supplementing federal-funded services and to report back to the Legislature.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Haler, Ranking Minority Member; Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Appleton, Pettigrew and Roberts.

Staff: Sydney Forrester (786-7120).

Background:

Foster Care Services Beyond Age 18

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

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 foster care up until the age of 19 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 foster care until age 21 for the purpose of 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 15 and 18 in foster care and youth who have aged out of foster care are eligible to receive independent living services (ILS) or transitional living services (TLS). 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 Amended Bill:

The Council is directed to conduct a statewide survey of service needs and gaps for transitional and independent living services to foster youth and former foster youth. The Council must consider research already completed by other agencies, including the Greater Pierce County Community Network. By December 1, 2007, the Council will report its findings and make recommendations to the Legislature for improving the delivery of services to youth who have or are preparing to transition out of foster care to independent living.

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) must work with stakeholders, including foster youth, former foster youth, and the community public health and safety networks established by the Council to develop a program for expanding and enhancing transitional and independent living services to foster youth and former foster youth. The program created must be based on the findings and recommendations of the Council, designed to ensure continued access to federal funding and make the most efficient use of federal and state funding in serving foster youth and former foster youth. The DSHS will report to the Legislature by December 1, 2009 regarding implementation of the program.

Amended Bill Compared to Engrossed Substitute Bill:

The provisions of the underlying bill are replaced with the following four requirements:

- (1) the Family Policy Council will survey the service needs and gaps for transitional and independent living services to foster youth and former foster youth;
- (2) the Council will report back to the Legislature with its findings and recommendations;
- (3) the DSHS will implement a program to supplement federally-funded services with state-funded services based on consultations with stakeholders and on the findings and recommendations of the Council; and
- (4) the DSHS will report back to the Legislature regarding implementation of the program.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on March 29, 2007.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This is such an important issue. As foster youth leave state care we need to make sure they have the means to continue on their own educational and career path, to achieve independence, to meet their goals, and to become successful adults. We should not wait until youth are 15 or 16 years old to begin preparing them for adulthood. We should have wraparound services available at an earlier age. A foster youth coordinator could help youth connect to the variety of other community agencies, including after school and mental health services.

This bill complements what is currently in place for foster youth. It would help prepare youth to access programs for which they are eligible. Social workers cannot always be aware of all the services in a community that can assist foster youth. This bill promotes an assets-based approach to youth development. It is a natural successor to HB 2002 passed last year. It also makes sense to be more proactive in preparing youth to transition out of foster care to independent living. This bill supports programmatic evaluation of the foster care system and recognizes that the acuity of kids who come into foster care require a case management model of care in order to provide young people with needed information in a timely manner.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Rasmussen, prime sponsor; Helen Myrick and Stephanie Burbach, Greater Pierce County Community Network; Dr. Steve Wolworth, Pacific Lutheran University and Greater Pierce County Community Network; Debbie Lewis, Alliance for Youth of Pierce County; and Ria Johnson.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.