

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 1867

As Passed House:
March 3, 2017

Title: An act relating to improving transitions in extended foster care to increase housing stability for foster youth.

Brief Description: Improving transitions in extended foster care to increase housing stability for foster youth.

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Fey, Stambaugh, Senn, Kagi, Kilduff, Appleton, Graves, Hudgins, Orwall, Ryu, Sells, Stanford, Robinson, McDonald, Ortiz-Self, Doglio, Slatter, Tharinger and Ormsby).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Early Learning & Human Services: 2/14/17, 2/15/17 [DP];
Appropriations: 2/22/17 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/3/17, 95-2.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Allows eligible youth to unenroll and reenroll in the extended foster care program an unlimited number of times between ages 18 and 21.
- Requires the Washington State Institute for Public Policy to conduct a study related to extended foster care and issue a preliminary report by December 1, 2018, and a final report by December 1, 2019.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & HUMAN SERVICES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Senn, Vice Chair; Dent, Ranking Minority Member; McDonald, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Frame, Goodman, Griffey, Kilduff, Klippert, Lovick, McCaslin, Muri and Ortiz-Self.

Staff: Luke Wickham (786-7146).

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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 27 members: Representatives Ormsby, Chair; Robinson, Vice Chair; MacEwen, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Stokesbary, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Buys, Caldier, Cody, Fitzgibbon, Hansen, Harris, Hudgins, Jinkins, Kagi, Lytton, Nealey, Pettigrew, Pollet, Sawyer, Senn, Springer, Stanford, Sullivan, Tharinger, Vick, Volz and Wilcox.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Chandler, Ranking Minority Member; Condotta, Haler, Manweller, Schmick and Taylor.

Staff: Mary Mulholland (786-7391).

Background:

Extended Foster Care Program.

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) operates the extended foster care program which allows individuals who are dependent in foster care at age 18 to receive services if that youth is:

- enrolled in a secondary education program or equivalent program;
- enrolled and participating in a postsecondary academic or postsecondary vocational program, or has applied for and can demonstrate an intention to timely enroll in a postsecondary academic or vocational program;
- participating in a program or activity designed to promote employment or remove barriers to employment;
- engaged in employment for 80 or more hours per month; or
- not able to engage in the above activities due to a documented medical condition.

For eligible youth that choose to participate in the extended foster care program on his or her eighteenth birthday, the dependency court action will continue. Eligible youth may choose to participate in the extended foster care after his or her eighteenth birthday and until the youth turns 19 years old through a voluntary placement agreement with the DSHS.

The services that youth may receive through the extended foster care program include:

- foster care placement or supervised independent living setting placement;
- medical (including mental health);
- dental;
- independent living skills;
- case management through the DSHS; and
- referrals to community resources.

In October 2016 there were 569 youth receiving extended foster care services.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The DSHS must allow youth who have received extended foster care services to reenter the program through a voluntary placement agreement when he or she meets the criteria again.

Individuals who are eligible for extended foster care services may unenroll and reenroll in extended foster care an unlimited number of times between ages 18 and 21.

The Washington Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) shall conduct a study measuring the outcomes for youth who have received extended foster care services. The study shall include: (1) measurements of any savings; (2) an outcome comparison for youth who have received extended foster care and those who aged out of foster care; and (3) a comparison of other state extended foster care programs. The WSIPP shall issue a report containing its preliminary findings to the Legislature by December 1, 2018, and a final report by December 1, 2019.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 7, 2017.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed. However, the bill is null and void unless funded in the budget.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Early Learning & Human Services):

(In support) Extended foster care should be extended to more youth. Many youth who are homeless could be served by the extended foster care program. Because extended foster care has been offered for a long time, it makes sense to do a study on this program. It is emotionally disturbing for a youth to leave extended foster care without the ability return. Without these services, many youth are forced into homelessness.

Of the approximately 500 youth who age out of foster care, only about a third enter extended foster care. This bill eliminates one of barriers that youth experience in entering extended foster care. Extended foster care provides a safety net for foster youth transitioning from foster care into independence. It is important to allow youth to make mistakes. Federal law allows states to reenter up to the maximum age allowed by a state for extended foster care. There are 15 states that allow youth to unenroll and reenroll an unlimited number of times. The circumstances of youth change, and this bill allows for flexibility to meet the changing needs of youth. According to a DSHS study, approximately 36 percent of foster youth experience homelessness within one year of leaving foster care.

(Opposed) None.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Appropriations):

(In support) The state extended foster care (EFC) program originated in 2003; since then the federal government began allowing states the option of receiving federal Title IV-E reimbursement for EFC. According to federal guidance, youth who reenroll in EFC can still continue to be eligible for federal Title IV-E reimbursement. The youth's own income would be looked at for the purposes of Title IV-E eligibility, as opposed to the income of their biological parents.

There is a great legacy in the state of making sure that public systems do not discharge young people into homelessness. A cost-benefit analysis from the 2006 Washington State Institute for Public Policy study showed that for every dollar invested, the youth received a \$5.16 return and taxpayers received a \$1.35 return. There is a cost savings every time young people are in school or working rather than being on the streets. It is time for another evaluation that will show the cost savings generated by EFC.

There are times when a youth may have to exit EFC, and they should be allowed to come back in. Young people may lose eligibility for reasons such as losing a job or system failures. The state has a good EFC program but there are limitations, and the breadth of the federal program could be better taken advantage of.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying (Early Learning & Human Services): Representative Fey, prime sponsor; Mary Van Cleve, Columbia Legal Services; Annie Blackledge, The Mockingbird Society; and Seth Dawson, Washington Association for Children and Families.

Persons Testifying (Appropriations): Jim Theofelis, A Way Home Washington; and Mary Van Cleve, Columbia Legal Services.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Early Learning & Human Services): None.

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