

FINAL BILL REPORT

2SHB 1922

C 316 L 07

Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Creating an independent youth housing program.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Pedersen, Pettigrew, Miloscia, McIntire, Walsh, Kagi, Appleton, Kenney, Hasegawa and Ormsby).

House Committee on Housing

House Committee on Appropriations

Senate Committee on Human Services & Corrections

Senate Committee on Ways & Means

Background:

There are approximately 400 youth who exit ("age-out of") foster care at age 18 each year in Washington. According to the "Foster Youth Transition to Independence Study" conducted by the Office of Children's Administrative Research (2004), within one year of exiting foster care, approximately:

- 13 percent had experienced homelessness; (*Another study, the "Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study" in 2005 documented that 22.2 percent of post-foster youth experienced homelessness.*)
- 50 percent had completed high school or obtained their GED;
- Less than 50 percent were employed and of those who were employed, 47 percent were making wages at or below the poverty line; and
- 30 percent were enrolled in at least one public assistance program.

The January 2006 state point-in-time count of homeless persons, coordinated by the Department of Community, Trade and Community Development (DCTED), counted 466 homeless youth under the age of 18 unaccompanied by an adult guardian. The State Emergency Shelter Assistance Program (ESAP) data shows that 1,131 homeless youth younger than 18 and unaccompanied by an adult guardian were provided shelter in Fiscal Year 2006. The ESAP data accounts for 2,495 youth ages 18 to 21 who were provided shelter in Fiscal Year 2006. There is anecdotal evidence that many homeless youth have been involved in the foster care system at some point in their lives.

Current Services to Former Foster Youth.

Extended Foster Care Under 2SHB 2002 (2006 Legislative Session). Each year, through 2008, 50 state-dependent youth reaching the age of 18 will be eligible to remain in foster care until age 21 if they are enrolled in higher education or a vocational program.

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). The DSHS uses federal monies (Chafee funds) to serve some youth who have left foster care (ages 18 to 21) through the Transitional Living Program. Youth may receive case management and access to some funding assistance for housing, employment and training, mental health services, education, and other services. The subcontracting agencies of the DSHS decide on a case-by-case basis what services are most needed by the individual youth. Up to 30 percent of the Transitional Living Program funds may be used for housing purposes. The DSHS serves approximately 400 youth through the Transitional Living Program, which represents approximately one-third of youth who would likely be eligible for the services.

The Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development. The DCTED assists small and medium counties to access federal "McKinney-Vento" homeless assistance dollars which may be used for project-based rental vouchers and case management for homeless youth or youth at risk of homelessness. Two organizations (Northwest Youth Services and Community Youth Services) provide such vouchers for youth, and together they serve about 25 young people each year at a cost between \$10,000 - \$15,000 per youth.

The Homeless Grant Assistance Program. The DCTED's Homeless Grant Assistance Program (HGAP) awarded Snohomish County a grant in 2007 to provide housing vouchers to 15 youth exiting foster care. The HGAP is funded with the state's portion of "2163" Homeless Housing Surcharge funds. A focus of the HGAP in the future will be funding programs that address state institutional discharge and re-entry issues.

The Interagency Council on Homelessness (Council). The Council has placed a priority focus on addressing issues at a state level related to discharge and re-entry planning. This would include issues related to youth exiting the foster care system.

Summary:

The Independent Youth Housing Program (Program) is created within the DCTED for the purpose of providing housing stipends and case management services to youth, ages 18 to 23, who have exited the state dependency system.

Two state goals are established consisting of:

- ensuring that all youth exiting the state dependency system have a decent, appropriate, and affordable home in a healthy, safe environment to prevent these youth from experiencing homelessness; and
- reducing each year the percentage of young people eligible for state assistance upon exiting the state dependency system.

The Program must be integrated and aligned with other state rental assistance and case management programs as well as with all existing services and programs designed to assist foster youth transition to independent living such as the Independent Living Program and the Transitional Living Program operated by the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). The Program must be included in the state's Homeless Housing Strategic Plan and any other state or local homeless or affordable housing plans.

The DSHS will collaborate with the DCTED to provide information about the Program to dependent youth and to refer dependent youth nearing the age of 18 to the Program. The DSHS will also provide information to the DCTED regarding the number of youth exiting the state dependency system eligible for state assistance and annually recommend strategies to the Legislature that may help reduce this number.

Eligible Youth.

Eligible youth include those who:

- were dependents of the state and are at least age 18 but not yet age 23;
- are very low-income youth whose income does not exceed 50 percent of the area median income, unless they agree to participate in a matched savings for asset accumulation program (such as an Individual Development Account program); and
- agree to pay a portion of their rent in a timely manner.

Priority is given to youth who have been dependents of the state for at least one year.

Program Administration.

The DCTED may contract with organizations to distribute housing stipends and provide housing-related services to youth. Services will include the development of an independent living plan, case management, information and referral services, and education on tenant rights and responsibilities.

Housing Stipend Details.

The DCTED will establish a formula to determine amounts of the housing stipends. Stipends will be based on factors including age, income, fair market rent for the area, and other housing and living situation variables.

Stipends must be used for "independent" housing, which cannot include accommodations with, or in premises owned by, former foster parents or biological parents. Stipends are payable to landlords or other housing management.

Evaluation and Reporting Requirements.

The DCTED will include a program report in the state's Homeless Housing Strategic Plan and any other relevant state and local plans. These reports will include annual evaluations of subcontractor organizations and will include specific performance measures.

The Washington State Institute for Public Policy will measure the outcomes for youth participating in the program and issue a final report by December 2010.

Votes on Final Passage:

House	64	32	
Senate	33	12	(Senate amended)
House	65	29	(House concurred)

Effective: July 22, 2007