AN ACT Relating to reducing homelessness for youth and young adults discharging from a publicly funded system of care; adding a new section to chapter 43.216 RCW; adding new sections to chapter 43.330 RCW; creating a new section; and providing an expiration date.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. Sec. 1. (1) The legislature finds that young people discharging from publicly funded systems of care are at increased risk of homelessness. Youth and young adults experiencing homelessness face traumatic events at a higher rate than their peers who have stable housing. Homelessness has long-term impacts on brain development and well-being and creates barriers to education and employment.

(2) RCW 43.330.720 establishes a goal that any unaccompanied youth discharged from a publicly funded system of care in our state will be discharged into safe and stable housing. The office of homeless youth prevention and protection programs and the department of children, youth, and families published the improving stability for youth exiting systems of care report in 2020 outlining steps to achieve this goal. These steps provide a multipronged approach to ensure youth exit publicly funded systems of care into safe and stable housing, including:
(a) System-level support while youth are in the custody of
publicly funded systems of care to ensure effective transition from
care;

(b) Community-level connections and services to provide support
when youth transition back to the community; and

(c) Resources to secure and maintain stable housing.

(3) The legislature intends to implement community services,
system response, and flexible resources to support the goal
established under RCW 43.330.720 that youth discharged from publicly
funded systems of care are discharged into safe and stable housing
with the appropriate supports in place to provide a strong footing.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 2. A new section is added to chapter 43.216
RCW to read as follows:

(1) The department, in coordination with the office of homeless
youth prevention and protection programs, the department of social
and health services, and the health care authority, shall develop and
implement a rapid response team that is prepared to respond
appropriately to support youth and young adults exiting a publicly
funded system of care. As part of the development and implementation
of the rapid response team, the department shall develop and
implement a system for:

(a) Identifying youth and young adults that should be served by
the rapid response team;

(b) Initiating use of the rapid response team in a timely manner
that will allow for the best possible transition planning; and

(c) Locating services and connecting youth and young adults with
those services to establish stability.

(2) The rapid response team developed under this section may
provide assistance and support to youth and young adults who are at
risk of becoming homeless and who are exiting a publicly funded
system of care with the goal of securing appropriate housing and
other supports for the youth or young adult. If there is no housing
identified for a youth or young adult upon exit, the rapid response
team shall meet before a youth or young adult transitions out of a
publicly funded system of care to allow the youth or young adult to
better prepare for the exit. The assistance and support provided
under this subsection should occur as soon as possible, particularly
if a youth or young adult presents risk factors that place the youth
at higher risk of possible homelessness.
Any of the following individuals may refer a youth to the rapid response team:

(a) A youth or young adult themselves;
(b) A family member of a youth or young adult;
(c) An advocate for a youth or young adult;
(d) A behavioral health service provider serving a youth or young adult; or
(e) A service provider contracting with the office of homeless youth prevention and protection programs.

For the purposes of this section:

(a) "Publicly funded system of care" has the same meaning as provided in RCW 43.330.720;
(b) "Rapid response team" means a team of representatives from relevant state agencies that meet to respond to complex cases involving a youth or young adult located anywhere in the state exiting a publicly funded system of care to support those youth or young adults with the goal of securing appropriate housing and other supports for the youth or young adult. Services and supports under this section must incorporate youth or young adult voice and choice. The services under this section must be responsive to the individual needs of each youth or young adult and may include, but are not limited to:

(i) Behavioral health services;
(ii) Civil legal aid;
(iii) Peer support;
(iv) Family reconciliation or engagement services;
(v) Employment support;
(vi) Education support;
(vii) Case management;
(viii) Housing and financial support; or
(ix) Other navigation support to secure safe and stable housing; and

(c) "Youth" and "young adult" have the same meaning as provided in RCW 43.330.702.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 3. A new section is added to chapter 43.330 RCW to read as follows:

(1) The office of homeless youth prevention and protection programs, in coordination with the department of children, youth, and families, shall administer flexible funding, subject to the amounts
appropriated for this specific purpose, to support persons under the age of 25 exiting publicly funded systems of care that need discrete support or funding to secure safe housing. The flexible funding provided under this section may be provided for immediate needs of the person. A person may receive support under this section more than once. Uses of the flexible funding provided under this section may include, but are not limited to, the following:

(a) Car repair or other transportation assistance;
(b) Rental application fees, a security deposit, or short-term rental assistance; or
(c) Other uses that will help support the person's housing stability, education, or employment, or meet immediate basic needs.

(2) The flexible funding provided under this section may be given to:

(a) Persons under the age of 25;
(b) Community-based providers, assisting persons under the age of 25 in planning for discharge and successfully discharging from a publicly funded system of care into safe and stable housing; and
(c) Individuals or entities, including landlords, providing safe housing or other housing-related support for persons under the age of 25.

(3) The office of homeless youth prevention and protection programs shall make training available to publicly funded systems of care and other professionals working with youth exiting publicly funded systems of care on how to access the flexible funds created under this section and best practices to divert youth from homelessness.

(4) For purposes of this section, "publicly funded system of care" has the same meaning as provided in RCW 43.330.720.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 4. A new section is added to chapter 43.330 RCW to read as follows:

(1) Subject to the amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the office of homeless youth prevention and protection programs shall select, monitor, and provide funding and assistance for a minimum of six total counties that implement housing stability for youth in crisis programs as described in this section for a period of three years.

(2) The housing stability for youth in crisis pilot programs must include the following components:
(a) Regular trainings provided to all appropriate juvenile court staff regarding risk factors and identifiers for youth homelessness;

(b) An identification and referral system used throughout the juvenile court system where all appropriate court staff use routine data flags to identify youth at risk for youth homelessness and refer youth to the housing stability coordinator described under (c) of this subsection;

(c) A dedicated housing stability coordinator in each participating county that receives referrals, conducts housing stability assessments with youth and caregivers, connects youth and caregivers with relevant community providers based on assessments, and follows up on referrals;

(d) A model of homelessness prevention services that provides the appropriate amount of intervention based on the youth or family needs; and

(e) Coordinated housing services for youth experiencing homelessness.

(3) By October 1, 2025, and in compliance with RCW 43.01.036, the office of homeless youth prevention and protection programs shall submit a report to the relevant committees of the legislature and the governor that includes:

(a) An evaluation of the housing stability for youth in crisis programs that includes outcome data for participants;

(b) Recommendations for improving the housing stability for youth in crisis programs; and

(c) Recommendation for expanding the housing stability for youth in crisis programs.

(4) This section expires July 1, 2026.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 5. A new section is added to chapter 43.330 RCW to read as follows:

(1) Subject to the amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the office of homeless youth prevention and protection programs shall provide system of care grants that prevent youth from exiting a publicly funded system of care into homelessness.

(2) The system of care grants funded under this section shall provide support to youth exiting a publicly funded system of care and may include:

(a) Behavioral health services;

(b) Civil legal aid;
(c) Peer navigators and support;
(d) Family reconciliation or engagement services;
(e) Employment support;
(f) Education support;
(g) Case management;
(h) Housing and financial support; or
(i) Other navigation support to secure safe and stable housing.

(3) For purposes of this section, "publicly funded system of care" has the same meaning as provided in RCW 43.330.720.