

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5908

As of January 9, 2024

Title: An act relating to the provision of extended foster care services to youth ages 18 to 21.

Brief Description: Providing extended foster care services to youth ages 18 to 21.

Sponsors: Senators Wilson, C., Frame, Billig, Dhingra, Hasegawa, Hunt, Kuderer, Liias, Lovelett, Lovick, Nguyen, Nobles, Stanford, Trudeau and Valdez.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services: 1/09/24.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Directs the Department of Children, Youth and Families to make a number of changes to the Extended Foster Care Program, including changing the eligibility requirements so a youth no longer has to meet federal eligibility requirements to be eligible for extended foster care.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Staff: Alison Mendiola

Background: Extended Foster Care (EFC) in the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) provides an opportunity for young adults who were a dependent of Washington State at age 18, to voluntarily agree to continue receiving foster care services, including placement services, while working on their goals towards independence. The dependency action will continue if the eligible youth elects to participate in the program on their 18th birthday. Eligible youth who do not elect to participate in EFC on their 18th birthday will have until their 21st birthday to voluntarily request to participate in EFC. Eligible youth may enter and exit the program as needed between the ages of 18 to 21 years old.

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

Extended foster care services means residential and other support services DCYF is authorized to provide. Services may include, but are not limited to, placement in a licensed, relative, or otherwise approved care, or supervised independent living settings; assistance in meeting basic needs; independent living services; medical assistance; and counseling or treatment.

To be eligible for EFC, youth must meet the following criteria on their 18th birthday:

- be dependent and enrolled in high school or a high school equivalency program;
- enrolled, applied for, or can show intent to timely enroll in a post-secondary academic or post-secondary vocational certification program;
- participating in a program or activity designed to promote or remove barriers to employment, including part-time employment;
- employed 80 hours or more a month; or
- unable to engage in any of the above activities due to a documented medical condition.

Summary of Bill: Extended Foster Care. A number of changes are made to the EFC program, including:

- DCYF must provide continued EFC services to nonminor dependents who request EFC;
- EFC services includes a supervised independent living subsidy;
- DCYF must develop policies and procedures to ensure dependent youth ages 15 and older are informed of the EFC program;
- DCYF may not create additional eligibility requirements;
- DCYF shall develop and implement rules and policies designed to provide age-appropriate social work support for youth in EFC through a codesign process that includes those with lived experience in the foster care system;
- a youth enrolled in EFC may elect to receive a licensed foster care placement or may live independently;
- a youth who is not in a licensed foster care placement is eligible for a monthly supervised independent living subsidy effective the date the youth signs the voluntary placement agreement, agrees to dependency, or informs their social worker they are living independently, whichever occurs first;
- if the youth is not residing in an approved supervised independent living setting, DCYF is to work with the youth to help identify an appropriate living arrangement until the youth is living in a safe location approved by DCYF or the court—during this time, DCYF shall continue to pay the monthly supervised independent living subsidy;
- a youth who is not in a licensed foster care placement upon signing an EFC agreement or voluntary placement agreement, and who has turned 18 years old, is to receive their initial supervised independent living subsidy within one week of signing either agreement; and
- DCYF is to pursue federal reimbursement where appropriate, including when a youth is residing in an approved supervised independent living setting.

The court shall maintain the dependency proceeding for any youth who is dependent at the age of 18 until the youth turns 21 or withdraws their agreement to participate.

Definitions. Supervised independent living subsidy means a foster care maintenance payment and a housing subsidy. The housing subsidy shall be calculated based on the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development's estimated fair market rent for the total amount of a one bedroom apartment in the county or metro area where the young person intends to reside, minus one-third of the foster care maintenance payment.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 3, 2024.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Unlike last year's proposal, this bill focuses on the current age for extended foster care, 18-20. All young people have expressed a need for continued support. It's our job as a state to help raise and support these young people until they can be successful on their own. EFC reduces homelessness, decreases use of public assistance, and the likelihood of their own child becoming party of system. 20 percent of eligible youth are not participating which is concerning which is why we need to further reduce barriers, allowing everyone to be eligible on their 18th birthday and not requiring the activities by federal law although those are certainly good goals, but may not be achievable for some right away. Providing a housing subsidy is a lifeline for youth striving for a stable future and make good fiscal sense. A WSIPP study shows that for every dollar invested in EFC we get a return of \$3.95. Crucial to speed up timeline for payments to youth, a youth shouldn't have to wait 6 months for their initial payment, becoming homeless while they wait.

CON: This bill isn't rooted in the totality of evidenced based research. We know youth need education and employment. This bill sends the wrong message.

OTHER: We released the EFC assessment, DYCF is working on recommendations, payment challenges and policies. The agency asked to increase subsidy and housing subsidy, some were funded, some were not. The internal work will lay the groundwork on improving outcomes. Technical concerns: there is a limitation on DCYF's payment system and it can't process 39 different rates. The timeline is not reasonable for a subsidy to be available within one week.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Claire Wilson, Prime Sponsor; Tara Urs, King County Department of Public Defense; S. Annie Chung, Legal Counsel for Youth and Children;

Ésminà James-Secret, House of Secret LLC (pending); Emiko Tajima, Director, Partners for Our Children (P4C) & School of Social Work University of Washington; Charles Smith, The Mockingbird Society; Daniel Lugo, Treehouse.

CON: Colleen Stark-Bell, N/A.

OTHER: Allison Krutsinger, Dept of Children, Youth, and Families.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.