SENATE BILL REPORT
SSB 5911

As Amended by House, March 5, 2026

Title: An act relating to strengthening the financial stability of persons in the care of the department of children, youth, and families.

Brief Description: Strengthening the financial stability of persons in the care of the department of children, youth, and families.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Human Services (originally sponsored by Senators Alvarado, Warnick, Boehnke, Frame, Nobles, Orwall, Riccelli, Trudeau and Wilson, C.).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services: 1/14/26, 1/20/26 [DPS-WM].
Ways & Means: 2/05/26, 2/09/26 [DPS (HS)].

Floor Activity: Passed Senate: 2/13/26, 48-0.
Passed House: 3/5/26, 93-2.

Brief Summary of First Substitute Bill

- Provides that as of January 1, 2027, the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) may not apply any benefits, payments, funds, or accrual paid to, or on behalf of, a young adult ages 18 to 21 receiving extended foster care services.
- Specifies when DCYF is to assess whether a youth may be eligible for such benefits and the agency's responsibilities.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5911 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Wilson, C., Chair; Frame, Vice Chair; Christian, Ranking Member; Orwall and Warnick.

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.

Staff: Alison Mendiola, 786-7488

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5911 as recommended by Committee on Human Services be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Robinson, Chair; Stanford, Vice Chair, Operating; Trudeau, Vice Chair, Capital; Frame, Vice Chair, Finance; Gildon, Ranking Member, Operating; Torres, Assistant Ranking Member, Operating; Schoesler, Ranking Member, Capital; Dozier, Assistant Ranking Member, Capital; Braun, Cleveland, Conway, Dhingra, Hansen, Hasegawa, Kauffman, Muzzall, Pedersen, Riccelli, Saldaña, Wagoner, Warnick, Wellman and Wilson, C..

Staff: Josh Hinman (786-7281)

Background: Young Adults in the Care of the Department of Children, Youth, and Families. A young adult may be in the care of the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) through the child welfare (dependency) system.

Anyone, including DCYF, may file a petition in court alleging that a child or youth should be a dependent of the state due to abuse, neglect, or because there is no parent, guardian, or custodian capable of adequately caring for the child. If a court determines a child should be a dependent, the court will conduct periodic reviews and make determinations regarding the child's placement, provision of services by DCYF, compliance of the parents, and whether progress has been made by the parents. When children are removed from the home of a parent or guardian during dependency proceedings, they may be placed in an out-of-home placement with relatives or with a foster parent.

Extended Foster Care (EFC) in 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 until their 21st birthday. The dependency action continues while the youth receives EFC services.

EFC services includes 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. A youth who is not in a licensed foster care placement is eligible for a monthly supervised independent living subsidy which is 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 a youth is not living 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 continues to pay the monthly supervised independent living

subsidy.

DCYF is to seek federal reimbursement when a youth is:

- 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
- is unable to engage in any of these activities due to a documented medical condition.

Funds of Children in the Care of the Department of Children, Youth, and Families. The secretary of DCYF (Secretary) is the custodian of funds for persons placed with DCYF. As custodian, the Secretary has the authority to disburse moneys from the person's funds for certain designated purposes, including for the personal needs of the person or to reimburse for public assistance expended on behalf of the person, which may include funds paid for the cost of the person's care. All funds held by the Secretary as custodian may be deposited into a single fund, with receipts and expenditures accounted on an individual basis. When the funds belonging to any one person exceeds $500, the Secretary may deposit the funds into a savings and loan association account, on behalf of the person. When the conditions of placement no longer exist, the Secretary must deliver all remaining funds to the person along with a full and final accounting of all receipts and expenditures.

Summary of First Substitute Bill: As of January 1, 2027, DCYF may not apply any benefits, payments, funds, or accrual paid to, or on behalf of, a person receiving EFC services from DCYF as reimbursement for the cost of their care.

When a person receiving EFC services is not already receiving Supplemental Security Income and Retirement, Survivors, and Disability Insurance benefits, DCYF is to assess whether the person is eligible for such benefits. When a person is assessed to be eligible for Social Security benefits, DCYF shall:

- assist the person to become a payee for Social Security benefits and maintain eligibility for those benefits when DCYF is the representative payee;
- assist individuals, who are designated as payees for their benefits, establish a financial account appropriate for receiving those benefits—such as a Washington Achieving a Better Life Experience Account, a checking or savings account, or another form of electronic banking;
- make reasonable efforts to identify a suitable individual to serve as a person's authorized representative, if needed; and
- serve as the authorized representative if neither the person nor DCYF can identify a suitable individual until the individual or DCYF can identify a suitable individual to serve in place of DCYF.

DCYF may contract with an external entity to administer and manage the accounts

governed by this act on DCYF's behalf.

When funds belonging to a person in DCYF's care exceeds $2,000, those funds may be deposited into a qualifying protected account, such as a Washington Achieving a Better Life Experience Program Account or a similar account, where the person is eligible for them.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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 on Original Bill (Human Services): *The committee recommended a different version of the bill than what was heard.* PRO: Ten to twelve percent of foster care youth have benefits, but Washington has a practice of garnishing their wages to pay for the cost of their care, often without the child or youth's knowledge. It's legal but that doesn't make it right. The youth face long odds when they leave state care. This bill will impact about 80 youth. Eleven states have eliminated this practice. We would have been the first if the Legislature had passed prior legislation on this issue. This is a tough budget year but it's also a tough budget year for folks in EFC who can't afford to buy life's essentials. This bill is narrowly tailored to only apply to those in EFC. This bill will make the transition into adulthood better for young adult with disabilities. Washington's practice to offset the cost of care for those receiving social security benefits is unjust. We should eliminate this practice for everyone in foster care but starting with adults is a great first step. The federal government has asked states to take immediate action on this issue. Maybe 12-24 youth are negatively impacted by this practice and it seems to be counterintuitive to EFC to take their money. What ever money the state takes far outweighs the benefit to the youth. Ending this practice will have an immediate impact and this money can help eliminate eviction notices, end couch surfing and unstable housing. The EFC stipend is not enough to cover a youth's basic needs. Allowing them to keep their federal benefits would be immensely beneficial.

Persons Testifying (Human Services): PRO: Senator Emily Alvarado, Prime Sponsor; Kim Justice, Partners for Our Children; Arthur Longworth, Team Child; Charles Smith, The Mockingbird Society.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Human Services): PRO: Taylor Campbell.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on First Substitute (Ways & Means): PRO: This bill ensures that foster youth are able to receive the federal SSI benefits that they are entitled to. This bill is a more refined and thoughtful approach than last year's version, because it

focuses on youth at a pivotal stage in their lives, while also reducing administrative costs. This bill represents an important step toward discontinuing this practice for all age groups.

This bill will strengthen the financial stability of young adults in the care of DCYF by allowing them to retain their benefits instead of having those resources taken by the state. Many youth in extended foster care rely on benefits like SSI as they transition to adulthood.

I am a proud trans woman of color and am a daughter of immigrants. I was in foster care and was adopted into an abusive household. SSI can assist those in extended foster care to stay off the streets or enter activities like prostitution.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Kim Justice, Partners for Our Children; Zanyah Coleman, Youth-Action Coalition; gisella Gonzales, team child.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Ways & Means): No one.

EFFECT OF HOUSE AMENDMENT(S):

- Strikes language that says DCYF does not have a fiduciary duty with respect to a person's social security benefits when the DCYF is not the representative payee for those benefits and inserts that when DCYF is the representative payee for benefits for a person in foster care or extended foster care, the DCYF maintains a fiduciary duty to manage the funds consistent with Social Security Administration rules and regulations. Technical changes.