

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5940

As of January 14, 2026

Title: An act relating to creating a housing assistance pilot program for youth enrolled in extended foster care.

Brief Description: Creating a housing assistance pilot program for youth enrolled in extended foster care.

Sponsors: Senators Wilson, C., Alvarado, Cleveland, Dhingra, Hasegawa, Nobles, Riccelli, Shewmake, Slatter, Valdez and Wellman.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services: 1/14/26.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Creates the Extended Foster Care Housing Pilot Program in the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF).
- Establishes that eligibility standards include being a youth receiving extended foster care services and being homeless.
- Directs DCYF to conduct a transition planning process with youth enrolled in extended foster care at least three months prior to their 21st birthday to plan for the youth's future housing needs.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Staff: Alison Mendiola, 786-7488

Background: Extended Foster Care. 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 until their 21st birthday. The dependency action

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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, and 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.

Foster Care Housing Program. The Foster Care Housing Program (FCHP) provides access to housing vouchers, temporary rental assistance, housing navigation, and case management for young people ages 18 through 24 who have recently left foster care or plan to leave foster care and extended foster care within 90 days of signing a lease agreement. To be eligible young people must have been in foster care after their 16th birthday. Services are provided by community-based organizations under contract with DCYF. The goal of FCHP is to create successful transitions into adulthood by ensuring housing stability upon a young person's exit from foster care. These services are provided in conjunction with federal housing vouchers provided by local Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) via the Foster Youth to Independence Program. FCHP eligible young people may be eligible for a voucher, or other housing supportive services, or both, depending on availability. Additional PHA restrictions may apply. Referrals to FCHP may be made by the young person themselves or any adult supporting them in their transition from foster care.

Foster Youth to Independence Program. The Foster Youth to Independence Program (FYI) provides youth with up to 36 months of housing assistance and support services to assist on their path to independence. Youth participating in FYI receive a Housing Choice Voucher.

Through the Housing Choice Voucher Program, formerly known as Section 8, housing authorities provide rental assistance for people with low incomes to rent from landlords.

Participants in the program receive a housing subsidy in the form of a voucher that they can use to rent a unit from any landlord who meets the voucher requirements. A participant must earn 50 percent or less of the area median income (AMI) to qualify and pay the portion of the rent and utilities not covered by the voucher, typically 30 to 40 percent of their monthly income. Preference is given to households at 30 percent or less of AMI and those who are homeless.

Youth eligibility requirements for FYI vouchers:

- were in foster care at some point between their 16th and 18th birthday;
- are between the ages of 18 to 24;
- have left foster care or will leave foster care within 90 days; and
- are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

Summary of Bill: The EFC Housing Pilot Program (program) is established for a period of two years, effective January 1, 2027, within DCYF to provide rental assistance and associated housing fees to eligible youth. Up to 50 youth are eligible for the program if they are receiving foster care services and are experiencing homelessness. Youth who are at risk of experiencing homelessness are eligible as well, subject to appropriation.

Rental assistance is to be provided to eligible youth based on the following criteria:

- rental assistance is provided for up to 24 months, not to exceed a youth's 21st birthday;
- the amount of rental assistance must be based on fair market rent in the youth's location;
- youth shall pay no more than 30 percent of their adjusted gross income toward rent, including the extended foster care subsidy; and
- if the youth's rent and utilities exceed the fair market rent for that location, the youth's contribution is not to exceed 40 percent of their monthly adjusted gross income, including the extended foster care subsidy.

DCYF shall:

- ensure that all eligible youth receive access to rental housing assistance;
- collect data on the housing status of youth in extended foster care on an annual basis; and
- conduct a competitive procurement process to identify an entity or entities to contract for the operation of the program:
 1. if no entity or entities are available to operate the program or specific parts of the program, DCYF may operate the program or the specific parts not operated by an outside entity; and
 2. the entity or entities must have a demonstrated understanding of the importance of stable housing for youth involved in the child welfare system.

By June 30, 2029, DCYF is to provide a report to the Legislature that includes the following information regarding the pilot program:

- the number of youth served;
- the number of months each youth received assistance;
- the total amount of assistance provided to each youth;
- the age, gender and race of the youth;
- the cost of the rental assistance provided to each youth, by county;
- the counties represented by the program participants;
- the number of youth on the waitlist for the program, if any; and
- any other information DCYF deems useful for the Legislature's consideration.

DCYF is to conduct a transition planning process with youth enrolled in EFC at least three months prior to that youth's 21st birthday. The transition planning process is to include, but is not limited to:

- assessing the youth's continued housing and financial stability;
- supporting the youth to apply to a federally funded housing voucher program when available, and if applicable;
- providing referrals to housing assistance; and
- providing referrals to benefits and services that support the financial stability of the youth including education, employment, physical and behavioral health care, and other available public benefits.

Appropriation: The bill contains a section or sections to limit implementation to the availability of amounts appropriated for that specific purpose.

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: PRO: We cannot ignore housing children in state care. SB 5908 passed two years ago and this bill expands on that. Too many youth in EFC fall through the cracks. While federal housing vouchers may be available, a youth has to exit EFC to accept that voucher. This bill helps address that problem. This version of the bill is a paired down version of last year's proposal, creating a pilot for only 50 youth in EFC. The report required in this legislation which will include information on outcomes, the cost of rental assistance, and the demographics of those served will give us the tools we need to better assist youth. We can invest now, or later when they become even more system involved which leads to more trauma. Half of the youth in EFC are homeless. This bill doesn't help all that would qualify but it's still helpful. Former foster youth are overrepresented when looking at youth homelessness.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Claire Wilson, Prime Sponsor; Erica Limon-Trefielo; Courtney Hageman, The Mockingbird Society; Charles Smith, The Mockingbird Society; Lydia O'Taylor, The Mockingbird Society; Jonas Rios, The Mockingbird Society.

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