

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF ANALYSIS

BILL #: CS/HB 597 Homelessness
SPONSOR(S): Health & Family Services Policy Council, Reed
TIED BILLS: **IDEN./SIM. BILLS:**

	REFERENCE	ACTION	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR
1)	Health Care Services Policy Committee	7 Y, 0 N	Preston	Schoolfield
2)	Health & Family Services Policy Council	23 Y, 0 N, As CS	Lowell	Gormley
3)	Government Operations Appropriations Committee	(ref. removed)		
4)	Full Appropriations Council on General Government & Health Care	30 Y, 0 N	Massengale	Leznoff
5)				

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

The bill creates and revises multiple sections of the Florida Statutes relating to homelessness. These changes include:

- Authorizing the collection of voluntary contributions in the amount of \$1 to be added to the issuance and renewal of motor vehicle registrations and drivers licenses to aid the homeless.
- Replacing the existing Emergency Financial Assistance for Housing program with a homeless prevention grant program to be administered by local homeless continuums of care to provide emergency financial assistance to families facing the loss of their current home due to financial or other crises.
- Amends definitions related to individuals who are homeless.
- Encourages local coalitions for the homeless to adopt the Housing First approach to ending homelessness.
- Encourages the Department of Children and Family Services and the community-based care lead agencies to develop and implement procedures to reduce the number of young adults who become homeless after leaving the child welfare system.
- Extends the 30 day temporary extension allowed for the documentation of age, health examinations, and immunizations required for school admission to youth in foster care.

The bill is expected to result in a savings of approximately \$200,000 in administrative costs for the Office on Homelessness, which may be used to provide additional prevention grants, and may generate an indeterminate amount of revenue from voluntary donations for grant programs to help the homeless.

The bill is effective July 1, 2009.

HOUSE PRINCIPLES

Members are encouraged to evaluate proposed legislation in light of the following guiding principles of the House of Representatives

- Balance the state budget.
- Create a legal and regulatory environment that fosters economic growth and job creation.
- Lower the tax burden on families and businesses.
- Reverse or restrain the growth of government.
- Promote public safety.
- Promote educational accountability, excellence, and choice.
- Foster respect for the family and for innocent human life.
- Protect Florida's natural beauty.

FULL ANALYSIS

I. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS

A. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

Background

The Council on Homelessness (council) and the State Office on Homelessness (office) were created in 2001 within the department.¹ The office coordinates state agency responses to homelessness, serves as a single point of contact on homeless issues in the state, and administers state-funded grant programs that support the activities of the 27 local homeless coalitions.

The 15 members of the council represent state agencies, counties, homeless advocacy organizations, and volunteers. The council's duties include coordinating state, local, and private agencies and providers to produce a program and plan for the state's response to the needs of persons who are experiencing homelessness. The council also collects and disseminates data and public information, monitors and provides technical assistance to local coalitions, develops policy and legislative proposals, and prepares an annual report and recommendations to the Legislature and the Governor.

Definition of Homeless

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act² is the first and only major federal legislative response to homelessness. The Act created programs to provide a range of services to people who are experiencing homelessness, including emergency shelter, transitional housing, job training, primary health care, education, and some permanent housing. The Act has been amended a number of times to broaden the scope and strengthen the provisions of the original legislation. McKinney-Vento contains both a general definition of "homeless individual" and a definition of "homeless children and youth".³ Children and youths who are experiencing homelessness are defined for the purpose of addressing problems that these children and youth face in enrolling, attending, and succeeding in school. Currently, children in Florida who are homeless can be granted a 30 day exception to providing records for purposes of school enrollment and obtaining health records and immunizations.

Housing First

Solutions to homelessness in both the public and private sectors have primarily been focused on providing individuals and families experiencing homelessness with emergency shelter or transitional

¹ Chapter 2001-98, L.O.F.

² Pub. L. No. 100-77 (1987). The original Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act was renamed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act in 2000.

³ McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. s. 11302.

housing. While emergency shelter may provide access to services for individuals and families in crisis, it often fails to address long-term needs. In addition, emergency shelters and transitional programs rarely assist individuals and families in overcoming the barriers they face in accessing permanent housing, such as poor credit and eviction histories, unemployment, and lack of move-in funds. As states and communities look for other solutions to the problem of homelessness, the “Housing First” methodology is being recognized as a dramatic new response to the problem of homelessness. Housing First stresses the immediate return of individuals and families to independent living. The approach is premised on the belief that vulnerable and at-risk individuals and families who are homeless are more responsive to interventions and social services support after they are in their own housing, rather than while living in temporary/transitional facilities or housing programs.⁴

At least one Housing First initiative has generated data that supports a cost savings compared to the more traditional methods of providing services to persons who lack housing. That project, the Denver Housing First Collaborative (DHFC) is a housing first program designed with the goals of increasing the residential stability and overall health status of chronically homeless individuals while reducing the utilization and costs of emergency services being provided to chronically homeless persons with taxpayer funds.⁵

Youth Aging Out of Foster Care

Although the prevalence of youth homelessness is difficult to measure, researchers estimate that about 5 to 7.7 percent of youth experience homelessness. With at least one million youth on the streets and in shelter, and thousands more leaving juvenile justice, mental health facilities, and leaving foster care systems, the problem of youth homelessness continues to increase.⁶ While the reasons for youth homelessness vary by individual, the primary causes appear to be either family breakdown or systems failure of mainstream programs like child welfare, juvenile corrections, and mental health programs. Between 20,000 and 25,000 youth ages 16 and older transition from foster care to legal emancipation, or “age out” of the system annually with few resources and multiple challenges.⁷ As a result, former foster care children and youth are disproportionately represented in the homeless population. Twenty-five percent of former foster youth nationwide reported that they had been homeless at least one night within two-and-a-half to four years after exiting foster care.⁸

Effect of Proposed Changes

The bill creates and revises multiple sections of the Florida Statutes relating to homelessness, which changes include:

- Authorizing the collection of voluntary contributions in the amount of \$1 to be added to the issuance and renewal of motor vehicle registrations and drivers licenses to aid the homeless;
- Replacing the existing Emergency Financial Assistance for Housing program with a homeless prevention grant program to be administered by local homeless continuums of care to provide emergency financial assistance to families facing the loss of their current home due to financial or other crises;

⁴ Beyond Shelter. Founded in 1988. The mission of Beyond Shelter is to develop systemic approaches to combat poverty and homelessness among families with children and enhance family economic security and well-being.

⁵ Perlman, J. and Parvensky, J. Colorado Coalition for the Homeless. Denver Housing First Collaborative Cost Benefit Analysis and Program Outcomes Report. December 11, 2006

⁶ Fundamental Issues to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness. Youth Homelessness Series, Brief No. 1. National Alliance to End Homelessness. May 2006. It is particularly dangerous for youth and young adults between the ages of 16 and 24 who do not have a familial support system. Living in shelters or on the streets, unaccompanied youth who are experiencing homelessness are at a higher risk for physical and sexual assault or abuse and physical illness, including HIV/AIDS. It is estimated that 5,000 unaccompanied youth die each year as a result of assault, illness, or suicide. Further, youth who are experiencing homelessness are at a higher risk for anxiety disorders, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicide due to increased exposure to violence while living on their own. These youth are also more likely to become involved in prostitution, to use and abuse drugs, and to engage in other dangerous and illegal behaviors.

⁷ According to DCF, in Florida, approximately 800 young adults leave the foster care system annually upon reaching their 18th birthday.

⁸ Fundamental Issues to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness. Youth Homelessness Series, Brief No. 1. National Alliance to End Homelessness. May 2006.

- Amending definitions relating to the homeless in general and homeless children in particular to conform with the federal definitions;
- Creating a new section of chapter 420 that encourages local coalitions to adopt the Housing First approach to ending homelessness;
- Creating a new section of chapter 420, related to children and young adults leaving the foster care system, that encourages DCF and the community based care lead agencies to develop and implement procedures to reduce the number of young adults who become homeless after leaving the system; and
- Providing the 30 day temporary extension currently provided to children who are homeless to provide documentation of age, health examinations, and immunizations required for school admission to youth in foster care. This allows children in foster care to enroll in school without delay while working to obtain necessary admissions documentation.

B. SECTION DIRECTORY:

Section 1. Amends s. 320.02, Florida Statutes, relating to motor vehicle registration.

Section 2. Amends s. 322.08, Florida Statutes, relating to application for a driver's license.

Section 3. Amends s. 322.18, Florida Statutes, relating to applications and renewals for a driver's license.

Section 4. Creates s. 414.161, Florida Statutes, relating to homeless prevention grants.

Section 5. Amends s. 420.507, Florida Statutes, relating to powers of the corporation to correct a cross reference.

Section 6. Amends s. 420.621, Florida Statutes, relating to definitions.

Section 7. Amends s. 420.622, Florida Statutes, relating to the State office on Homelessness and the Council on Homelessness.

Section 8. Amends s. 420.625, Florida Statutes, relating to a grant-in-aid program.

Section 9. Creates s. 420.6275, Florida Statutes, relating to Housing First.

Section 10. Creates s. 420.628, Florida Statutes, relating to children and adults leaving foster care.

Section 11. Amends s. 1003.01, Florida Statutes, relating to definitions.

Section 12. Amends s. 1003.21, Florida Statutes, relating to school attendance, to conform terminology.

Section 13. Amends s. 1003.22, Florida Statutes, relating to school-entry health examinations and immunization.

Section 14. Repeals s. 414.16, Florida Statutes, relating to an emergency assistance program.

Section 15. Provides an effective date of July 1, 2009.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

The department reported that the voluntary contributions authorized by the bill could provide new revenue for the Challenge and Homeless Housing Assistance grants. Based on other voluntary contributions on motor vehicle registrations and driver's license applications and renewals, a conservative estimate would be a minimum of \$20,000. The highest amount a voluntary contribution has generated was \$78,665 in FY 2007-2008.

The department also estimates that replacing the existing Emergency Financial Assistance for Housing program with a homeless prevention grant program to be administered by local homeless continuums of care would result in an annual savings of approximately \$200,000 to administer the program.

2. Expenditures:

DCF reported that the cost for the expanded membership on the Council on Homelessness will be \$7,500, recurring, for travel and meeting materials. This cost can be absorbed in the current budget of the Office on Homelessness.

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

The \$200,000 administrative savings may be used to increase homeless prevention grants.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

None.

III. COMMENTS

A. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES:

1. Applicability of Municipality/County Mandates Provision:

Not applicable. The bill does not require counties or municipalities to take an action requiring the expenditure of funds, reduce the authority that counties or municipalities have to raise revenue in the aggregate, nor reduce the percentage of state tax shared with counties or municipalities.

2. Other:

None.

B. RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY:

None.

C. DRAFTING ISSUES OR OTHER COMMENTS:

None.

IV. AMENDMENTS/COUNCIL OR COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE CHANGES

On March 25, 2009, the Health and Family Services Policy Council adopted an amendment which removed the requirement that funding priority be given to those local homeless assistance continuums of care that adopt and prioritize the Housing First approach.

The bill was reported as favorable as amended and the analysis reflects the bill as amended.