

1 A bill to be entitled
2 An act relating to independent living
3 transition services; amending s. 409.1451,
4 F.S.; requiring each district of the Department
5 of Children and Family Services to identify
6 adolescent foster children with developmental
7 disabilities or special mental health needs;
8 revising eligibility requirements for
9 participation in the Road-to-Independence
10 Scholarship Program and transitional support
11 services; providing for young adults to
12 continue in foster care in lieu of a
13 Road-to-Independence Scholarship; providing
14 effective dates.

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16 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

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18 Section 1. Subsection (1) and paragraphs (b) and (c)
19 of subsection (5) of section 409.1451, Florida Statutes, are
20 amended to read:

21 409.1451 Independent living transition services.--

22 (1) SYSTEM OF SERVICES.--

23 (a) The Department of Children and Family Services or
24 its agents shall administer a system of independent living
25 transition services to enable older children in foster care
26 and young adults who exit foster care at age 18 to make the
27 transition to self-sufficiency as adults.

28 (b) The goals of independent living transition
29 services are to assist older children in foster care and young
30 adults who were formerly in foster care to obtain life skills
31 and education for independent living and employment, to have a

1 quality of life appropriate for their age, and to assume
2 personal responsibility for becoming self-sufficient adults.

3 (c) Each district of the Department of Children and
4 Family Services shall identify adolescent foster youth with
5 developmental disabilities or special mental health needs. The
6 department shall work with these foster youth to help them
7 make the transition to self-sufficiency and shall assist the
8 youth and young adults with reasonable accommodations for
9 their disabilities. The department shall assist the youth with
10 accessing support and funding from other sources, such as the
11 department's Developmental Disabilities Office and the
12 department's Mental Health Office. The department shall
13 coordinate the independent living plan for a youth with the
14 school's individual education plan for a child who is in a
15 special education program. The department shall give special
16 attention to 17-year-old foster children residing at
17 residential treatment facilities, therapeutic foster homes, or
18 other mental health placements who face a particularly
19 difficult transition to living as adults in the community.

20 (d)~~(e)~~ State funds for foster care or federal funds
21 shall be used to establish a continuum of services for
22 eligible children in foster care and eligible young adults who
23 were formerly in foster care which accomplish the goals for
24 the independent living transition services and provide the
25 service components for services for foster children, as
26 provided in subsection (3), and services for young adults who
27 were formerly in foster care, as provided in subsection (5).

28 (e)~~(d)~~ For children in foster care, independent living
29 transition services are not an alternative to adoption.
30 Independent living transition services may occur concurrently
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1 with continued efforts to locate and achieve placement in
2 adoptive families for older children in foster care.

3 (5) PROGRAM COMPONENT OF SERVICES FOR YOUNG ADULTS
4 FORMERLY IN FOSTER CARE.--Based on the availability of funds,
5 the department shall provide or arrange for the following
6 services to young adults formerly in foster care who meet the
7 prescribed conditions and are determined eligible by the
8 department. The categories of services available to assist a
9 young adult formerly in foster care to achieve independence
10 are:

11 (b) Road-to-Independence Scholarship Program.--

12 1. The Road-to-Independence Scholarship Program is
13 intended to help eligible students who are former foster
14 children in this state to receive the educational and
15 vocational training needed to achieve independence. The amount
16 of the award shall equal the earnings that the student would
17 have been eligible to earn working a 40-hour-a-week federal
18 minimum wage job, after considering other grants and
19 scholarships that are in excess of the educational
20 institutions' fees and costs, and contingent upon available
21 funds. Students eligible for the Road-to-Independence
22 Scholarship Program may also be eligible for educational fee
23 waivers for workforce development postsecondary programs,
24 community colleges, and universities, pursuant to s.
25 1009.25(2)(c).

26 2. A young adult 18 to 21 years of age is eligible for
27 the initial award, and a young adult under 23 years of age is
28 eligible for renewal awards, if he or she:

29 a. Is a dependent child, pursuant to chapter 39, and
30 is living in licensed foster care or in subsidized independent
31 living at the time of his or her 18th birthday;

1 b. Has spent at least 6 months living in foster care
2 before reaching his or her 18th birthday;

3 c. Is a resident of this state as defined in s.
4 1009.40; and

5 d. Meets one of the following qualifications:

6 (I) Has earned a standard high school diploma or its
7 equivalent as described in s. 1003.425 or s. 1003.43, and has
8 been admitted for full-time enrollment in an eligible
9 postsecondary education institution as defined in s. 1009.533;

10 (II) Is enrolled full time in an accredited high
11 school, is within 2 years of graduation, and has maintained a
12 grade point average of at least 2.0 on a scale of 4.0 for the
13 two semesters preceding the date of his or her 18th birthday
14 or, in the case of a student in a special education program in
15 an accredited high school, has met the minimum grade point
16 average required by that program to graduate; or

17 (III) Is enrolled full time in an accredited adult
18 education program or high school equivalency diploma program
19 designed to provide the student with a high school diploma or
20 its equivalent, is making satisfactory progress in that
21 program as certified by the program, and is within 2 years of
22 attaining a high school diploma or its equivalent ~~graduation.~~

23 3.a. The department must advertise the availability of
24 the program and must ensure that the children and young adults
25 leaving foster care, foster parents, or family services
26 counselors are informed of the availability of the program and
27 the application procedures.

28 b. A young adult must apply for the initial award
29 during the 6 months immediately preceding his or her 18th
30 birthday. A young adult who fails to make an initial
31 application, but who otherwise meets the criteria for an

1 initial award, may make one application for the initial award
2 if such application is made before the young adult's 21st
3 birthday.

4 c. If funding for the program is available, the
5 department shall issue awards from the scholarship program for
6 each young adult who meets all the requirements of the
7 program.

8 d. An award shall be issued at the time the eligible
9 student reaches 18 years of age.

10 e. If the award recipient transfers from one eligible
11 institution to another and continues to meet eligibility
12 requirements, the award must be transferred with the
13 recipient.

14 f. Scholarship funds awarded to any eligible young
15 adult under this program are in addition to any other services
16 provided to the young adult by the department through its
17 independent living transition services.

18 g. The department shall provide information concerning
19 young adults receiving the Road-to-Independence Scholarship to
20 the Department of Education for inclusion in the student
21 financial assistance database, as provided in s. 1009.94.

22 h. Scholarship funds shall be terminated when the
23 young adult has attained a bachelor of arts or bachelor of
24 science degree, or equivalent undergraduate degree, or reaches
25 23 years of age, whichever occurs earlier.

26 i. The department shall evaluate and renew each award
27 annually during the 90-day period before the young adult's
28 birthday. In order to be eligible for a renewal award for the
29 subsequent year, the young adult must:

30 (I) Complete at least 12 semester hours or the
31 equivalent in the last academic year in which the young adult

1 earned a scholarship, except for a young adult who meets the
2 requirements of s. 1009.41.

3 (II) Maintain the cumulative grade point average
4 required by the scholarship program, except that, if the young
5 adult's grades are insufficient to renew the scholarship at
6 any time during the eligibility period, the young adult may
7 restore eligibility by improving the grade point average to
8 the required level.

9 j. Scholarship funds may be terminated during the
10 interim between an award and the evaluation for a renewal
11 award if the department determines that the award recipient is
12 no longer enrolled in an educational institution as defined in
13 sub-subparagraph 2.d., or is no longer a state resident. The
14 department shall notify a student who is terminated and inform
15 the student of his or her right to appeal.

16 k. An award recipient who does not qualify for a
17 renewal award or who chooses not to renew the award may
18 subsequently apply for reinstatement. An application for
19 reinstatement must be made before the young adult reaches 23
20 years of age, and a student may not apply for reinstatement
21 more than once. In order to be eligible for reinstatement, the
22 young adult must meet the eligibility criteria and the
23 criteria for award renewal for the scholarship program.

24 4. A young adult who is eligible to receive a
25 Road-to-Independence Act Scholarship may, in lieu of the
26 scholarship award, request to receive independent living
27 services including case management in a foster home or
28 residential group care placement. The costs shall not exceed
29 the scholarship award.

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1 ~~1. A young adult receiving continued services of the~~
2 ~~foster care program under former s. 409.145(3) must transfer~~
3 ~~to the scholarship program by July 1, 2003.~~

4 (c) Transitional support services.--

5 1. In addition to any services provided through after
6 care support or the Road-to-Independence Scholarship, a young
7 adult formerly in foster care, may receive other appropriate
8 short-term services, which may include financial, housing,
9 counseling, employment, education and other services, if the
10 young adult demonstrates that the services are critical to the
11 young adult's own efforts to achieve self-sufficiency and to
12 develop a personal support system.

13 2. A young adult formerly in foster care is eligible
14 to apply for transitional support services if he or she is 18
15 to 23 years of age, was a dependent child pursuant to chapter
16 39, was living in licensed foster care or in subsidized
17 independent living within 6 months ~~at the time~~ of his or her
18 18th birthday, and had spent at least 6 months living in
19 foster care before that date.

20 3. If at any time the services are no longer critical
21 to the young adult's own efforts to achieve self-sufficiency
22 and to develop a personal support system, they shall be
23 terminated.

24 Section 2. This act shall take effect October 1, 2003,
25 except that subparagraph 409.1451(5)(b)4., Florida Statutes,
26 shall take effect upon this act becoming a law.

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