

SENATE STAFF ANALYSIS AND ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: Children and Families Committee

BILL: CS/SB 220

SPONSOR: Children and Families Committee and Senator Wilson

SUBJECT: Independent Living Transition Services

DATE: April 25, 2005

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Rousseau	Whiddon	CF	Fav/CS
2.	_____	_____	HA	_____
3.	_____	_____	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____	_____
6.	_____	_____	_____	_____

I. Summary:

The Committee Substitute for Senate Bill 220 provides that instead of aging out of the foster care system at age 18, older children in foster care not eligible for the educational stipend known as the Road to Independence Scholarship will be given the option of choosing to remain in the foster care system and receiving all foster care program services until age 21 through a pilot program in Miami-Dade County.

II. Present Situation:

The Department of Children and Families (department) administers a system of foster care services for children birth through age 17. Subsection 39.01(29), F.S., defines "foster care," to mean "care provided a child in a foster family or boarding home, group home, agency boarding home, child care institution or any combination thereof." Subsection 39.01(12), F.S., defines "child", to mean "any unmarried person under the age of 18 years who has not been emancipated by the order of the court." There is no definition for "foster care services."

An array of services is provided to children ages birth through 17 in foster care. Services are also provided to their families to achieve safety, permanency, and well-being for the children. Chapter 39, F.S., provides for assessment, case planning, service delivery and case review for children in foster care. In addition, the statute provides for medical, mental health and residential treatment services for children in foster care. Children in foster care currently have a judicial review of their case at least every six months. All of these services are funded by a combination of federal (primarily Title IV-E and Medicaid) and state general revenue funds.

As one of the services provided to children in foster care, the Department of Children and Families administers a system of independent living services throughout Florida. The two eligible populations are children age 13 through age 17 in foster care and young adults formerly in foster care age 18 through age 22. The state law governing this program is s. 409.1451, F.S. These services are funded through a combination of federal funds (Chafee Grant and the Education and Training Voucher) and state general revenue funds. According to the Department of Children and Families, as of October 31, 2004, there were 29,510 children in out-of-home care in Florida, including 14,838 children in licensed foster care and 14,672 children in relative/non-relative care. Of the 14,838 children in licensed foster care, there were 4,467 children age 13 through 17 who were eligible for independent living services. Children in relative/non-relative care are not eligible for these services.

Many stakeholders in Florida and across the United States are concerned about the population of young people exiting the nation's foster care system at age 18. The primary concerns are about young people's ability to be self-supporting and achieve independence without the support of a family and the quality of preparation for independence that foster children ages 13-17 are given. Some states, including Texas, Illinois and New York, retain children in foster care until the age of 21, if doing so is determined to be in the best interest of the child.

Programs including independent living services were implemented at the national and state levels in order to provide support to young people to assist them in transition to adulthood. These programs are focused on providing educational and employment services and designed to prevent young people from being homeless, unemployed, poverty stricken, unmarried parents, high school drop outs, incarcerated, and from exhibiting other high-risk behaviors. These services are based on the five key purposes outlined in the Federal John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program. Those purposes are to:

- Identify children who are likely to remain in foster care until 18 years of age and help these children make the transition to self-sufficiency by providing services such as assistance in obtaining a high school diploma, career exploration, vocational training, job placement and retention, training in daily living skills, training in budgeting and financial management skills, substance abuse prevention, and preventive health activities.
- Help children who are likely to remain in foster care until 18 years of age receive the education, training, and services necessary to obtain employment.
- Help children who are likely to remain in foster care until 18 years of age prepare for and enter postsecondary training and education institutions.
- Provide personal and emotional support to children aging out of foster care, through mentors and the promotion of interactions with dedicated adults.
- Provide financial, housing, counseling, employment, education, and other appropriate support and services to former foster care recipients between 18 and 21 years of age to complement their own efforts to achieve self-sufficiency and to ensure that program participants recognize and accept their personal responsibility for preparing for and then making the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

The Road-to-Independence (RTI) scholarship program is intended to help former foster children, ages 18-22 years, receive the educational and vocational training needed to achieve independence. Of all former foster children, approximately 30 percent (987) are eligible to participate in this program. In order to receive RTI Scholarship benefits, recipients must be

former foster youth who have earned a standard high school diploma or its equivalent and enrolled full-time in an eligible postsecondary education institution as defined in s. 1009.533, F.S. Participants are allowed to live in their former foster home placements where they were residing at the time of their 18th birthday (s. 409.1451(5)(b), F.S.), and when the foster parent is willing for the young person to remain in his/her home, there are many benefits for the youth. This provision does not apply, however, to those who are not eligible for the RTI program, even though those who are not eligible are sometimes the most vulnerable young adults who may particularly benefit from the continuity of remaining with their former foster families.

The former foster children who are not eligible for the RTI program may be eligible to receive Aftercare Support Services which continue to develop the skills and abilities necessary for independent living. The services available include, but are not limited to, mentoring and tutoring, mental health services and substance abuse counseling, life skills classes, parenting classes, job skills training and temporary financial assistance (s. 409.1451 (5)(a), F.S.). In addition to any services provided through aftercare support or the Road-to-Independence Scholarship, a young adult formerly in foster care may receive Transitional Services which are other short-term services, including financial, housing, counseling, employment, education, mental health, disability and other services (s. 409.1451 (5)(c), F.S.). According to the department, as of October 31, 2004, there were 3,429 former foster children ages 18, 19 and 20. Of that number, 987 receive the Road-to-Independent Scholarship. The department also reports that 969 young people received Transitional Services and 478 received Aftercare Support Services. However, since these services are available to both RTI and non-RTI eligible youth and since an individual may receive services in multiple categories, these numbers do not suggest a potential number of applicants to continue foster care services after age 18.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The Committee Substitute for Senate Bill 220 directs the Department of Children and Family Services to create an optional continued foster care pilot program in Miami- Dade County. The department may accept no more than 100 former foster youth who are not eligible to receive the Road-to-Independence Scholarship into the pilot program. Any young adult who chooses to participate in this pilot program will continue to receive all foster care services, remain under continued court jurisdiction, and remain in their current foster or group home placement or another licensed foster home arranged by the department until he or she leaves the pilot program or until he or she reaches 21 years of age. The young adult must inform the court at his or her last judicial review hearing before reaching 18 years of age of the decision to participate in the pilot program.

The department will use the independent living assessment tool as defined in s. 409.1451(4)(B)4., F.S., to assess each youth. The department shall also identify a cohort of 100 former foster youth who were not eligible for the Road-to-Independence Scholarship and who live in a county other than Miami-Dade County for the purpose of comparing to the pilot program participants.

The department must prepare a report to the Legislature on the findings of the pilot program no later than December 1, 2008. The report must include an analysis, including a fiscal analysis ,

and a recommendation of the benefits and drawbacks of duplicating the pilot program in the entire state. This section shall be repealed on July 1, 2009.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

C. Government Sector Impact:

The department estimates that implementation of CS/SB 220 will cost \$717,469 in FY 2005-2006 and \$724,402 in FY 2006-2007. This estimate includes the cost for nine case workers for case management and foster home recruitment and retention and two supervisors and Medicaid for 100 young adults.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Summary of Amendments:

None.

This Senate staff analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's sponsor or the Florida Senate.
