

By Senator Albritton

26-00653B-22

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1 A bill to be entitled
2 An act relating to the Step Into Success internship
3 program; creating s. 409.1455, F.S.; providing a short
4 title; establishing the Step Into Success internship
5 program within the Department of Children and Families
6 for eligible foster youth; requiring the program to
7 include qualified designated personnel who are
8 responsible for specified services; requiring that
9 eligible foster youth receive priority consideration
10 for certain internship positions; defining terms;
11 requiring the department to establish an internship
12 program by a specified date; requiring the department
13 to designate and ensure sufficient qualified staff to
14 implement and maintain the program; requiring the
15 department to prepare written educational and training
16 materials by a specified date and update the materials
17 at least annually; requiring the department to provide
18 training and written materials to designated
19 personnel; requiring the department to provide certain
20 written materials to foster youth; requiring lead
21 agencies to ensure such materials are provided to
22 subcontracted providers; requiring the department to
23 advertise and promote the program; requiring the
24 department to provide specified training to foster
25 youth; requiring such training to be provided in
26 addition to other specified training; authorizing the
27 development of such training by or in collaboration
28 with specified entities; providing construction;
29 requiring the department to develop and provide

26-00653B-22

2022764__

30 trauma-informed training to mentors; requiring the
31 department to provide assistance with the program's
32 administrative and procedural requirements to
33 interested foster youth; requiring the department to
34 publicize internship opportunities and inform foster
35 youth of where to locate the information; requiring
36 the department to assess the career interests of
37 foster youth; requiring the department to ensure
38 internships comply with the Fair Labor Standards Act;
39 requiring the department to collaborate with specified
40 entities to establish a system by a specified date for
41 secondary institutions to award college credits;
42 requiring the department to conduct follow-up
43 interviews with participating foster youth within a
44 specified timeframe and for a specified purpose;
45 requiring the department to submit data from such
46 interviews by a specified date annually for inclusion
47 in a specified report; requiring the department to
48 gather and compile feedback from mentors assigned to
49 participating foster youth or personnel from
50 participating agencies for a specified purpose;
51 requiring the department to submit compiled mentor
52 feedback by a specified date annually for inclusion in
53 a specified report; requiring the department to
54 collaborate with the Florida Institute of Child
55 Welfare in preparation of an annual report; requiring
56 approved agencies to provide and monthly update a list
57 of open employment opportunities for which eligible
58 foster youth may apply; requiring approved agencies to

26-00653B-22

2022764__

59 offer foster youth priority consideration under
60 certain circumstances; requiring approved agencies to
61 recruit mentors to work with participating foster
62 youth employed through the program; providing
63 requirements for such mentors; specifying payment
64 procedures and requirements for mentors; requiring
65 approved agencies to implement certain procedures
66 before discharging foster youth; requiring approved
67 agencies to provide feedback and collaborate in
68 preparation of a specified report; limiting the
69 timeframe for foster youth participation in the
70 internship program; authorizing the continued
71 employment of foster youth under certain conditions;
72 specifying conditions of employment for foster youth
73 as interns; requiring a foster youth to meet
74 eligibility requirements at the time of applying for
75 an internship position; requiring foster youth to
76 complete specified training within certain timeframes;
77 authorizing the department or designated lead agencies
78 or subcontracted providers to determine if an
79 interested foster youth needs to complete training
80 before applying; requiring that foster youth be
81 classified as other-personal-services employees;
82 specifying prerequisite conditions for discharging a
83 foster youth intern; limiting the number of hours per
84 week a foster youth may work; requiring foster youth
85 to spend certain stipend funds for specific purposes
86 and comply with certain dress code requirements;
87 applying employment protections to foster youth

26-00653B-22

2022764__

88 employed through the internship program; excluding
89 compensation earned under the internship program from
90 the definition of earned income for calculating
91 economic self-sufficiency benefits; specifying
92 requirements and conditions for foster youth to earn
93 college credit for work performed in the internship
94 program; granting postsecondary educational
95 institutions with discretion to determine
96 administrative compliance requirements; requiring
97 approved agencies to cooperate with postsecondary
98 educational institutions to provide specified
99 information; requiring the Florida Institute for Child
100 Welfare to submit an annual report to the Governor and
101 the Legislature within a certain timeframe; providing
102 requirements for the report; requiring the department
103 and approved agencies to adopt rules; amending s.
104 414.56, F.S.; revising the duties of the Office of
105 Continuing Care to include establishing and operating
106 an internship program; providing appropriations;
107 providing an effective date.

108
109 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

110
111 Section 1. Section 409.1455, Florida Statutes, is created
112 to read:

113 409.1455 Internship program for foster youth.-

114 (1) SHORT TITLE.-This section may be cited as the "Step
115 Into Success Act."

116 (2) CREATION.-There is established the Step Into Success

26-00653B-22

2022764__

117 internship program to be administered by the department for
118 eligible foster youth to develop essential workforce and
119 professional skills in furtherance of their careers, to
120 transition from the custody of the department to independent
121 living, and to become best prepared for an independent and
122 successful future. The establishment of this program must
123 include qualified designated personnel whose responsibilities
124 are to provide the required services to approved agency liaison
125 personnel and eligible foster youth in accordance with this
126 section. An eligible foster youth must receive priority
127 consideration for any internship positions as provided under
128 this section.

129 (3) DEFINITIONS.—For purposes of this section, the term:

130 (a) "Approved agency" means one of the following agencies
131 that may participate in the internship program by employing
132 eligible foster youth:

- 133 1. The Department of Children and Families;
- 134 2. The Department of Health;
- 135 3. The Agency for Health Care Administration;
- 136 4. The Department of Education;
- 137 5. The Department of Environmental Protection;
- 138 6. The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission; and
- 139 7. The Office of the State Fire Marshal within the
140 Department of Financial Services.

141 (b) "Community-based care lead agency" has the same meaning
142 as in s. 409.986(3)(d).

143 (c) "Foster youth" means an individual older than 16 years
144 of age but younger than 26 years of age who is currently or was
145 previously placed in foster care within this state.

26-00653B-22

2022764__

146 (d) "Priority consideration" means the approved agency must
147 invite a foster youth who is eligible to participate in the
148 internship program to be interviewed for any position for which
149 he or she meets the minimum qualifications.

150 (4) PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS OF THE DEPARTMENT.—The department
151 shall establish an internship program for foster youth which
152 begins operations on or before January 1, 2023, and complies
153 with all of the following requirements:

154 (a) Designate and ensure that there is sufficient qualified
155 staff to implement and maintain operation of the internship
156 program.

157 (b) By November 1, 2022, prepare written educational and
158 training materials for foster youth, including a toolkit to
159 explain the internship program process, resources to assist in
160 participating in the internship and entering the professional
161 workforce, and guidance on securing an internship position and
162 update the material thereafter at least once annually. Resources
163 may include, but are not limited to, workshops and materials to
164 assist with preparing resumes and staff assistance with securing
165 internship positions.

166 (c) Provide all relevant training and written materials on
167 the internship program to designated personnel within the
168 approved agencies and any other relevant tools to such agencies
169 to ensure successful participation in the program.

170 (d) Provide written materials to foster youth to ensure
171 that all such youth are informed of the requirements for
172 participating in the program and the contact information for the
173 program office. All community-based care lead agencies shall
174 ensure that any subcontracted providers that directly serve

26-00653B-22

2022764__

175 youth are also provided with the training and written materials.

176 (e) Advertise and promote the availability of the
177 internship program to engage as many eligible foster youths as
178 possible.

179 (f) Provide to eligible foster youth a minimum of 2 hours
180 of training relating to interview skills and a minimum of 4
181 hours of training relating to professional and leadership
182 development skills that are relevant to performing the functions
183 required of the positions offered by participating approved
184 agencies. The training required in this paragraph must be
185 provided in addition to any other life skills or employment
186 training required by law and may be developed or administered by
187 the department, community-based care lead agencies, or the lead
188 agencies' subcontracted providers or through collaboration with
189 the approved agencies, colleges or universities, or non-profit
190 organizations in the community that have workforce training
191 resources. This paragraph may not be construed to limit the
192 number of hours of training offered in which a foster youth may
193 participate.

194 (g) Develop and provide a minimum of 1 hour of trauma-
195 informed training to mentors who serve under this section to
196 ensure that they have the skills necessary to engage with
197 participating foster youth.

198 (h) Provide assistance with the program's administrative
199 and procedural requirements to foster youth interested in
200 participating in the internship program, including, but not
201 limited to, identifying and monitoring internship opportunities
202 offered by approved agencies, being knowledgeable of the
203 training and skills needed to match eligible foster youth to

26-00653B-22

2022764__

204 appropriate roles offered by approved agencies, and assisting
205 eligible foster youth with applying for employment positions in
206 which they meet the minimum required qualifications.

207 (i) Publicize specific opportunities for internship
208 positions offered by approved agencies in an easily accessible
209 manner and inform foster youth who may be eligible for the
210 program of where to locate such information.

211 (j) Assess each foster youth's career interests and
212 determine the most appropriate internship opportunities based on
213 his or her expressed interests.

214 (k) Ensure that internships under this section comply with
215 the Fair Labor Standards Act.

216 (l) By November 1, 2022, facilitate and work with the
217 Department of Education, the Board of Governors of the State
218 University System, the Independent Colleges and Universities of
219 Florida, the Commission for Independent Education, and approved
220 agencies to establish a system for secondary institutions to
221 award college credit toward a degree for internship positions
222 held by foster youth through the internship program.

223 (m) Conduct follow-up interviews with participating foster
224 youth within 3 months after their employment start date to
225 ensure participants transition successfully into the work
226 environment and to gather feedback on how to improve the
227 experience for future participants. Such data must be submitted
228 to the Institute for Child Welfare by August 1, 2023, and by
229 August 1 annually thereafter for inclusion in the report
230 required under subsection (8).

231 (n) Gather and compile feedback from mentors assigned to
232 participating foster youth or from other personnel who are

26-00653B-22

2022764__

233 employed by participating agencies on how to improve the
234 experience for both foster youth participants and the approved
235 agencies that participate in the program. Such data must be
236 submitted to the Institute for Child Welfare by August 1, 2023,
237 and by August 1 annually thereafter for inclusion in the report
238 required under subsection (8).

239 (o) Collaborate with the Florida Institute of Child Welfare
240 to provide any requested information necessary to prepare each
241 annual report required under subsection (8).

242 (5) PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS OF APPROVED AGENCIES.—Each
243 approved agency shall:

244 (a) Provide the department, or the community-based care
245 lead agencies or the lead agencies' subcontracted providers,
246 with a list, updated at least monthly, of open employment
247 opportunities for which an eligible foster youth may apply to
248 seek employment through the internship program.

249 (b) Offer priority consideration, including an interview,
250 to any eligible foster youth who applies for an open other-
251 personal-services position pursuant to this section, provided he
252 or she meets all the minimum qualifications for employment in
253 such position.

254 (c) Recruit employees within approved agencies to serve as
255 mentors for foster youth employed with such agencies through the
256 internship program.

257 1. To serve as a mentor, employees must:

258 a. Have worked for the approved agency for a minimum of 1
259 year;

260 b. Have experience relevant to the employment
261 responsibilities of the intern;

26-00653B-22

2022764__

262 c. Complete a minimum of 1 hour of trauma-informed training
263 to gain skills critical for successfully engaging youth who have
264 been involved in the foster care system; and

265 d. Pass a level 2 background screening as provided in s.
266 435.04 if the employee will be assigned to a foster youth who is
267 younger than 18 years old and if the employee has not passed
268 such a screening within the previous 3 years or is not exempt
269 from such requirement pursuant to s. 435.07. An employee
270 required to pass a level 2 background screening pursuant to this
271 sub-subparagraph must submit a full set of his or her
272 fingerprints to his or her employing approved agency. The
273 approved agency shall forward the fingerprints to the Department
274 of Law Enforcement for state processing, and the Department of
275 Law Enforcement shall forward the fingerprints to the Federal
276 Bureau of Investigation for national processing. The department
277 shall pay the fees for state and federal fingerprint processing.
278 The fee per each name submitted for processing shall be set at
279 the same amount as prescribed in s. 943.053(3)(e); however, if
280 any exceptions in that paragraph for a reduced fee are
281 applicable, the department may pay the reduced fee under such
282 circumstances.

283 2. Employees who serve as mentors for a minimum of 6
284 consecutive months are eligible for a maximum payment of \$1,000
285 per intern per fiscal year, to be issued as follows:

286 a. At the conclusion of the first 6 consecutive months of
287 service, \$500.

288 b. At the conclusion of an additional 6 consecutive months
289 of service, \$500.

290 3. An employee may serve as a mentor for a maximum of three

26-00653B-22

2022764__

291 interns at one time, but may not receive more than \$3,000 in
292 compensation per fiscal year for serving as a mentor. Any time
293 spent serving as a mentor to an intern under this section counts
294 toward the required minimum service to be eligible for payments
295 pursuant to subparagraph 2.

296 (d) Engage an intern's assigned mentor and the approved
297 agency's internship program liaison and, if applicable, document
298 the intern's failure to comply with a corrective action plan
299 after being given a reasonable opportunity to do so before
300 discharging a foster youth employed pursuant to this section.

301 (e) Provide relevant feedback to the department at least
302 annually for the department to comply with paragraphs (4) (m) and
303 (n).

304 (f) Collaborate with the Florida Institute of Child Welfare
305 to provide any requested information necessary to prepare each
306 annual report required under subsection (8).

307 (6) TIME LIMITATIONS FOR PARTICIPATION.—A foster youth who
308 obtains employment with an approved agency may participate in
309 the internship program for no more than 1 year from his or her
310 start date of employment as an other-personal-services employee
311 with an approved agency pursuant to this section. A foster youth
312 may be employed as an intern under the internship program by
313 more than one approved agency, but may not be employed by more
314 than one approved agency at the same time. However, an approved
315 agency may extend the employment of a foster youth beyond the 1-
316 year internship program in his or her capacity as an other-
317 personal-services employee or may hire the foster youth as a
318 full-time employee, but the extension of employment or hiring of
319 a foster youth may not be as an intern pursuant to this section.

26-00653B-22

2022764

320 (7) CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT.—As conditions of employment
321 as an intern under the internship program, a foster youth shall
322 be subject to all of the following:

323 (a) A participant must meet the definition of foster youth
324 as defined in paragraph (3) (c) at the time such youth applies
325 for an internship position with an approved agency.

326 (b) A foster youth must complete the minimum training
327 requirements provided in paragraph (4) (f) related to
328 interviewing before an interview with an approved agency and
329 must complete all other training before commencement of work
330 within the approved agency. The department, or, if designated,
331 the community-based care lead agencies or the lead agencies'
332 subcontracted providers, may determine on a case-by-case basis
333 if an eligible foster youth needs to complete training before he
334 or she applies for an internship position.

335 (c) If offered employment as an intern, a foster youth must
336 be classified as an other-personal-services employee. Foster
337 youth who have accepted employment with an approved agency
338 pursuant to this section may be discharged after the approved
339 agency has engaged the intern's assigned mentor and the approved
340 agency's internship program staff to assist the intern and has
341 documented the intern's failure to comply with a corrective
342 action plan after being given a reasonable opportunity to do so.

343 (d) A foster youth may work a maximum of 20 hours per week.

344 (e) A foster youth shall spend all stipend funds received
345 for the specific purpose of purchasing business attire or
346 clothing that is in compliance with the dress code requirements
347 of the approved agency with which the foster youth is employed.
348 Notwithstanding any limitation on funds provided to purchase

26-00653B-22

2022764__

349 clothing, foster youth shall comply with any dress code
350 requirements of the approved agency with which he or she is
351 employed.

352 (f) A foster youth shall be afforded the employee
353 protections of all relevant and applicable federal and state
354 laws, including compensation at minimum wage for any work
355 performed. Compensation earned pursuant to employment gained
356 through the internship program may not be considered earned
357 income for purposes of computing eligibility for federal or
358 state benefits, including, but not limited to, the Supplemental
359 Nutrition Assistance Program, a housing choice assistance
360 voucher program, the Temporary Cash Assistance Program, the
361 Medicaid program, or the school readiness program.

362 (g) A foster youth may, at the discretion of a
363 postsecondary institution within this state in which such youth
364 is enrolled, earn college credits toward a degree for work
365 performed as an intern under the internship program. College
366 credits earned for work performed under the internship program
367 may be in addition to any compensation earned for the same work
368 performed under the internship program and may be awarded for
369 completion of the whole or any part of the internship program.
370 An institution has the discretion to determine whether the
371 foster youth must comply with administrative requirements to be
372 eligible for college credit, but must treat such positions the
373 same as if a student obtained employment through a means other
374 than the internship program. Approved agencies shall cooperate
375 with postsecondary educational institutions to provide any
376 information about internship positions which is necessary to
377 enable the institutions to determine whether to grant the

26-00653B-22

2022764__

378 participating foster youth credit toward his or her degree.

379 (8) REPORTS.—By October 1, 2023, and annually thereafter,
380 the Florida Institute for Child Welfare shall submit a report to
381 the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of
382 the House of Representatives which evaluates the internship
383 program, including, but not limited to, whether the program is
384 in compliance with this section; the outcomes of foster youth
385 who obtain employment through the internship program; a summary
386 of the feedback received pursuant to paragraphs (4) (m) and (n)
387 from participating foster youth and mentors from approved
388 agencies who have participated in the program; and
389 recommendations, if any, for actions necessary to improve the
390 effectiveness and outcomes of the program.

391 (9) RULEMAKING.—The department and approved agencies shall
392 adopt rules to implement this section.

393 Section 2. Subsection (5) is added to section 414.56,
394 Florida Statutes, to read:

395 414.56 Office of Continuing Care.—The department shall
396 establish an Office of Continuing Care to ensure young adults
397 who age out of the foster care system between 18 and 21 years of
398 age, or 22 years of age with a documented disability, have a
399 point of contact until the young adult reaches the age of 26 in
400 order to receive ongoing support and care coordination needed to
401 achieve self-sufficiency. Duties of the office include, but are
402 not limited to:

403 (5) Establishing and operating an internship program for
404 foster youth and complying with the requirements of s.
405 409.1455(4).

406 Section 3. For the 2022-2023 fiscal year, the sums of

26-00653B-22

2022764__

407 \$1,292,378 in recurring funds and \$350,376 in nonrecurring funds
408 are appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the Department
409 of Children and Families to implement this act.

410 Section 4. This act shall take effect July 1, 2022.