

- SUBJECT:** Transitional living services program for youth aging out of foster care
- COMMITTEE:** Human Services — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 8 ayes — Rose, Darby, Elkins, Hernandez, Hughes, Legler, Naishtat, Walle
- 0 nays
- 1 absent — Herrero
- WITNESSES:** For — Conni Barker, DePelchin Children's Center, One Voice; Vivian Dorsett; Nancy Ellis; Elizabeth Gallardo; Scott Obrien, Lifeworks; Jodie Smith, Texans Care for Children; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Jane Burstain, Center for Public Policy Priorities; Dawn Choate, The Arc of Texas; Alison Dieter, Texas Gray Panthers; Nicole Dumas; Cody Egan; Christine Gendron, Texas Network of Youth Services; Stephanie Gonzales; Diana Martinez, TexProtects, Texas Association for the Protection of Children; Susan Murphree, Advocacy Incorporated; Charles Oerter, Texas Association of Child Placing Agencies; James Pepper; Jason Sabo, Children at Risk; Madison Sloan, Texas Appleseed; Andrea Sparks, Texas CASA; Laura Wolf, CASA of Travis County)
- Against — None
- BACKGROUND:** The Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) runs Texas' foster care programs. Children "age out" of foster care upon turning 18 and are no longer eligible for many benefits. DFPS administers programs to ease the transition from foster care to independent living, including the Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program, which was implemented in 1986 and has provided instruction in money management, job skills, housing, and transportation. The minimum age for participation in the PAL program is 16. Transitioning foster youth cannot receive PAL benefits if they return to a home in which the original perpetrator of abuse or neglect lives.
- DIGEST:** CSHB 1912 would create the Transitional Living Service Program, which would include and expand upon the existing PAL program. The minimum

age for participation in the new program would be 14, and a youth could be enrolled in the PAL program before age 16.

Under the Transitional Living Service Program, DFPS would assist youth in obtaining experiential life-skills training to improve their transition to independent living. The training would be individually tailored to a youth's skills and abilities and could include practical skills such as:

- grocery shopping;
- meal preparation and cooking;
- using public transportation;
- performing basic household tasks; and
- balancing a checkbook.

The bill would redefine the PAL program as a component of the Transitional Living Services Program, providing independent living skills assessment, short-term financial assistance, basic self-help skills, and life-skills development and training regarding money management, job skills, health and wellness, planning for the future, housing and transportation, and interpersonal skills. The Transitional Living Services Program would be for youth between the ages of 14 and 21, currently or formerly in foster care, who were transitioning from foster care to independent living. The program would provide PAL program services and Education and Training Voucher Program services.

The bill would require DFPS to identify best practices for an individualized approach to foster care transitioning services that considered the skills and abilities of each youth and provided opportunities for self-determination. DFPS also would establish a workgroup including former foster care youth, life-skills and after-care service providers, court-appointed special advocates (CASAs), and other individuals with expertise in the needs of transition-age youths.

DFPS would be required to develop a comprehensive plan to incorporate the best practices identified and the recommendations of the workgroup to:

- ensure that each foster youth age 16 or older received an individual assessment of developmental needs and future goals to develop an individual transitional service plan tailored to the youth;
- modify the PAL program training curriculum to offer online training and selections to meet the needs of individual youth; and

- ensure that transitional living services were appropriate and met the individual and specialized needs of a foster youth with disabilities.

CSHB 1912 would allow a youth who was at least 18 years of age to receive transitional living services, other than foster care benefits, while residing with a person who was previously designated as a perpetrator of abuse or neglect if DFPS determined that the individual was no longer a threat to the youth.

DFPS would ensure that each youth obtained a copy of a certified birth certificate, a social security card, and a Department of Public Safety (DPS) personal identification certificate on or before turning 16 years of age. The department would appoint a contact person to assist youth in obtaining or replacing the documents, in addition to the youth's primary caseworker.

The bill would require that individuals who contracted with DFPS to provide transitional living services included:

- housing services;
- job training and employment services;
- college preparation services;
- general education development (GED) certificate services; and
- any other appropriate transitional living service identified by the department.

DFPS would submit a report to the Legislature, no later than September 1, 2010, including the plan developed, any recommended statutory changes, and a request for any additional funding needed to implement the transitional living services plan.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2009.