

DCF LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY



2/18/2020

TESTIMONY OF

Stacy Tidwell, Deputy Director of Youth Services
Kansas Department for Children and Families

TESTIMONY ON

HB 2338

Chair

Concannon

Vice Chair

Esau

Ranking Member

Ousley

and

Members of the Committee

SUMMARY OF ISSUE & DCF POSITION

House Bill 2338 would require DCF establish a pilot program to assist youths in foster care obtain a driver's license. The bill would allow DCF to, through this pilot program, reimburse or directly pay the costs of a youth in foster care completing driver's education, obtaining a license, and obtaining motor vehicle insurance.

DCF requested and introduced this legislation because the department believes it is important that youths in foster care have the opportunity to obtain a driver's license and participate in the related activities, both for their social development and their development into an adult individual that can provide for themselves.

CONTEXT & HISTORY

Each year, approximately 390 young people age out of foster care in Kansas. DCF is committed to helping these youth support themselves after they leave the department's care. DCF Independent Living services work with youths in foster care beginning at age 14 to plan for their transition to adulthood, helping them make plans for their education and employment, and informing them about services available after they leave DCF custody, such as job assistance, education vouchers and stipends.

However, participation in driver's education, obtaining a driver's license, and the acquisition of motor vehicle insurance are opportunities not often afforded to youth who have experienced out of home placement in the custody of DCF.

As of November 2020, for youth receiving Foster Care services there were:

- **1,928** youth ages 14 to 21 in DCF out of home placement in Kansas
 - **80** youth ages 14 to 21 in out of home placement who have completed driver's education
 - **109** youth ages 14 to 21 in out of home placement who have a learner's permit
 - **53** youth ages 14 to 21 in out of home placement who have access to a vehicle
 - **45** youth ages 14 to 21 in out of home placement who are included on their placement provider's car insurance policy

Transitioning to adulthood without driver's education or obtaining a driver's license creates real barriers for these young adults to pursue employment and education opportunities, especially in communities without a public transportation system. Completing driver's education and obtaining adequate licensure and insurance coverage allows youth to engage in normal, age-appropriate activities while also increasing a young person's employment and education opportunities through enhanced mobility.

This is also an issue of economic support for youth in foster care and could be an economic opportunity for the state. Increased employment opportunities in turn leads to an improved quality of life and lessens the possibility of future system dependence. Public safety risks on roadways are also decreased when drivers have completed driver's education and obtained their license.

Many foster families would like to help Kansas young people become safe drivers, but it is cost prohibitive. Though youth in out of home placement in the custody of DCF currently have access to driver's education and

may obtain a driver's permit or license through the same avenues as any other Kansas youth, foster care placements are rarely able to support the required driving practice hours or the costs of insuring a young driver.

DCF believes teens in foster care should have access to the same adolescent experience as every other teenager. Extracurricular activities, working and learning to drive a car should be normal for youth placed in foster care. By covering the cost of insurance and the family's insurance deductible, this creates a pathway for young people to practice driving and earn the needed hours to obtain licensure, giving them one of the tools they need to lead fulfilling and self-sufficient lives.

EFFECT OF LEGISLATION

House Bill 2338 will require, to the extent that funding is available, DCF to establish a pilot program to assist youth in foster care complete driver's education, obtain a driver's license, and obtain motor vehicle insurance. DCF plans to release a Request for Proposals for the pilot program should HB 2338 be enacted. While DCF would establish eligibility requirements and procedures for payment and reimbursement, this contractor/grantee would be responsible for publicizing the program and directly providing services to youths.

The primary service provided will be removing obstacles that prevent youths from obtaining a driver's license and developing driving skills. This could include technical assistance with applications, as well as financial support to cover eligible costs including the cost of driver's education, examination fees, driver's licenses fees, motor vehicle insurance, and other costs incidental to ensuring youth in foster care have the opportunity to complete a driver's education program and obtain a license. The intention will be to serve as many youths as funding allows. Funds will be dispersed in the order that applications are approved until funds are exhausted.

FISCAL IMPACT OF LEGISLATION

DCF projects it will cost a minimum of \$250,000 to establish the pilot program in FY 2022 and to maintain the program in subsequent years. With this appropriation, DCF estimates it can provide access to driver's education, motor vehicle insurance, and licensure costs for 50 to 100 young people in the first fiscal year.

DCF POSITION

DCF asks for your support for House Bill 2338. Implementation of this pilot program would provide the relational support and financial resources needed for youth to successfully complete driver's education, complete the required driving practice hours, and obtain their learner's permit or driver's licenses. In addition to making Kansas roadways safer for all, this legislation will promote self-sufficiency, normalcy, and economic stability for youth who have experienced foster care.