

INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES
ADVISORY COUNCIL
2019 ANNUAL REPORT

The Independent Living Services Advisory Council (hereafter the Council) was formed in 2005 to improve interagency policy and service coordination to better support older eligible foster youth in the successful transition to adulthood. Florida has designed an array of services, as required by Section 409.1451 (7), Florida Statutes, (F.S.) to support older foster youth and former foster youth to help them become independent self-supporting young adults. These services are funded through a web of federal grants, general revenue dollars, and national, state and community private funds. These services are broadly defined in statute but are implemented differently throughout the state through many different Community Based Care (CBC) providers. Florida Statute allows the Council the "purpose of reviewing and making recommendations concerning the implementation and operation of the independent living services." the Council brings together political, senior executive, and career staff from local, state and federal agencies across multiple systems to collaborate on recommendations related to services for older foster youth. The culmination of this annual process are the recommendations in this report to the Florida Legislature and the Department of Children and Families (DCF) on the status of the services being provided, including successes and barriers to these services. In calendar year 2019, the Council has met monthly discussing various topics within Independent Living including Aftercare Services, Extended Foster Care, and Post-Secondary Education Services and Support. Recommendations were developed around the Council's roles and responsibilities, Extended Foster Care Allowance, Keys to Independence, and Positive Pathways. the Council considered recommendations surrounding summer enrollment for Postsecondary Education Support Services, but after further discussion it was determined the confusion surrounding this topic was a training concern around the state and has been discussed on statewide independent living calls.

ILSAC Membership Roles and Responsibilities

Currently, Council duties include but are not limited to assessing, advising, and reporting the implementation and operation of Extended Foster Care (EFC), Postsecondary Education Services and Support (PESS), and Aftercare Services; actions that would improve programs to meet established goals; problems experienced or identified; barriers to effective and efficient integration of services across systems; successes the system of care has achieved; and efforts to publicize the availability of EFC, PESS, and Aftercare Services.

The Council would like to see clearly defined roles and responsibilities for the Chair, Co-Chair, Secretary, and Council Members.

Recommendations:

1. The roles and responsibilities of the Chair include attending at least 90% of meetings and serving in this role for two-years, unless extenuating circumstances arise; facilitating and leading all meetings; working closely and collaborating with the ILSAC Administrative Support person, the Co-Chair, and the Secretary; coordinating an annual call to discuss prospective council members and shared with the Secretary of DCF; review and submit recommendations of the ILSAC report to the ILSAC Administrative Support person, which is due in October; setting the vision for the ILSAC and holding Council Members accountable; provide overall vision and leadership as well as be aware of parliamentary rules to effectively run council meetings; being responsible to follow up with members who are not meeting expectations to determine if there are issues and make recommendations to the Council regarding continuing membership; and setting the agenda for the year and coordinate all presentations.
2. The roles and responsibilities of the Co-Chair include attending at least 90% of meetings and serving in this role for two-years, unless extenuating circumstances arise; facilitating meetings in the absence of the Chair; working closely and collaborating with the Chair, Secretary, and the ILSAC Administrative Support person; assisting with recommendations for the ILSAC report which is due in October; and assisting with setting the vision for the ILSAC and assisting the Chair with coordinating presentations throughout the year.
3. The roles and responsibilities of the Secretary include attending at least 90% of meetings and serving in this role for two-years, unless extenuating circumstances arise; taking attendance and notes on all calls and face-to-face meetings; working closely and collaborating with the Chair, Co-Chair, and the ILSAC Administrative Support person; Providing the attendance roster and notes within 48 hours to the ILSAC Administrative Support person, the Chair, and Co-Chair. If the secretary is unable to make a meeting,

they must notify the Co-Chair and Council Members to provide timely attendance of an alternate Council Member.

4. The roles and responsibilities of all Council Members include participating in discussions during the first meeting set in January, as the ILSAC sets projected meeting dates for the upcoming year, including face-to-face dates. At a minimum, ILSAC will have 3 face-to-face meetings: beginning in January and two meetings set in August and September to draft ILSAC's recommendations. It is strongly recommended that Council Members attend all face-to-face meetings, unless there are extenuating circumstances that may limit travel. If that's the case, Council Members are strongly encouraged to call in unless there are other extenuating circumstances (i.e. you are on FMLA, etc.); participating in at least 75% of meetings throughout the year and not miss more than 3 consecutive meetings. If a member has not been able to attend at least 75% of meetings or misses 3 consecutive meetings, the Chair will recommend separation from the Council; communicating to the Chair and ILSAC Administrative Support person at least two days prior of set meeting and provide availability; participating on a call to discuss and make recommendations for prospective council members and share that with DCF's Secretary; and taking an active role in drafting and assisting with recommendations for the ILSAC report which is due yearly in October.

Extended Foster Care Allowance:

Extended Foster Care allowance is defined in the FSFN Payment Reference Guide as “A payment amount made directly to an EFC young adult to manage for discretionary expenses, such as savings, cell phone, cable television, entertainment, and leisure transportation. The amount of the allowance is based on a needs assessment”.

Need expenses are related to addressing/eliminating potential barriers to the young adult successfully “participating in their qualifying activity.” These expenses include housing, food, clothing, transportation to and from qualifying activity, and personal incidentals.

Needs and discretionary expenses discussed with the young adult should be outlined under the Financial Resources section of the Shared Living Plan (CF-FSP 5430) form.

There has been a lack of consistency in the administration of services related to allowance payments. Based on the Council’s inquiry, some agencies reported providing young adults with no allowance and others reported providing varied payment amounts that includes the cost of foster care.

Recommendations:

1. The language from the FSFN Payment Reference Guide, “The amount of the allowance is based on a needs assessment”, should be removed.
2. The language from the FSFN Payment Reference Guide defining EFC allowance should be revised to remove cell phones as discretionary expenses and rather re-classified as a needs expense.
3. The monthly allowance should be standardized to a minimum of \$100.

Keys to Independence

The Keys to Independence Program (K2I) is a State funded program administered by Embrace Families, designed to remove barriers in obtaining a driver's license for foster youth and former foster youth. K2I assists with the 4-hour course, learner's license, driver's education, driver's license and insurance. Throughout the 5 year life of K2I, 547 youth have acquired driver's licenses and 1080 youths have acquired learner's licenses.

Obtaining a driver's license is a rite of passage for youth as they transition into adulthood. In a state like Florida, it is often times a necessity to function as an adult and be able to get to work and school. While the program's primary focus is assisting youth under the age of 18 currently in foster care, there is some overlap in services with the population and programs this council is charged with assessing, advising, and reporting on.¹

Young adults that are in Extended Foster Care (EFC) are eligible for K2I as long as they are enrolled in EFC. Young adults in Postsecondary Education Services and Support (PESS) qualify for the K2I Program for up to 6 months from PESS acceptance date. Young adults who exited services through the Department, also qualify for the K2I Program for up to 6 months from the date the youth left care. While these young adults qualify for the K2I Program, it is not a guarantee of acceptance into the program or to receive the full benefits of K2I if budgetary limitations exist.²

Recommendations:

1. The Council recommends that legislation should expand eligibility to include young adults participating in PESS, as defined in Section 409.1451, F.S., while enrolled in PESS and that the legislature provide appropriate funding for the expanded eligibility.

¹ Council duties include but are not limited to assessing, advising, and reporting on:

1. Implementation and operation of Extended Foster Care (EFC), Postsecondary Education Services and Support (PESS), and Aftercare Services
2. Actions that would improve programs to meet established goals
3. Problems experienced or identified
4. Barriers to effective and efficient integration of services across systems
5. Successes that system of care has achieved
6. Efforts to publicize the availability of EFC, PESS, and Aftercare Services.

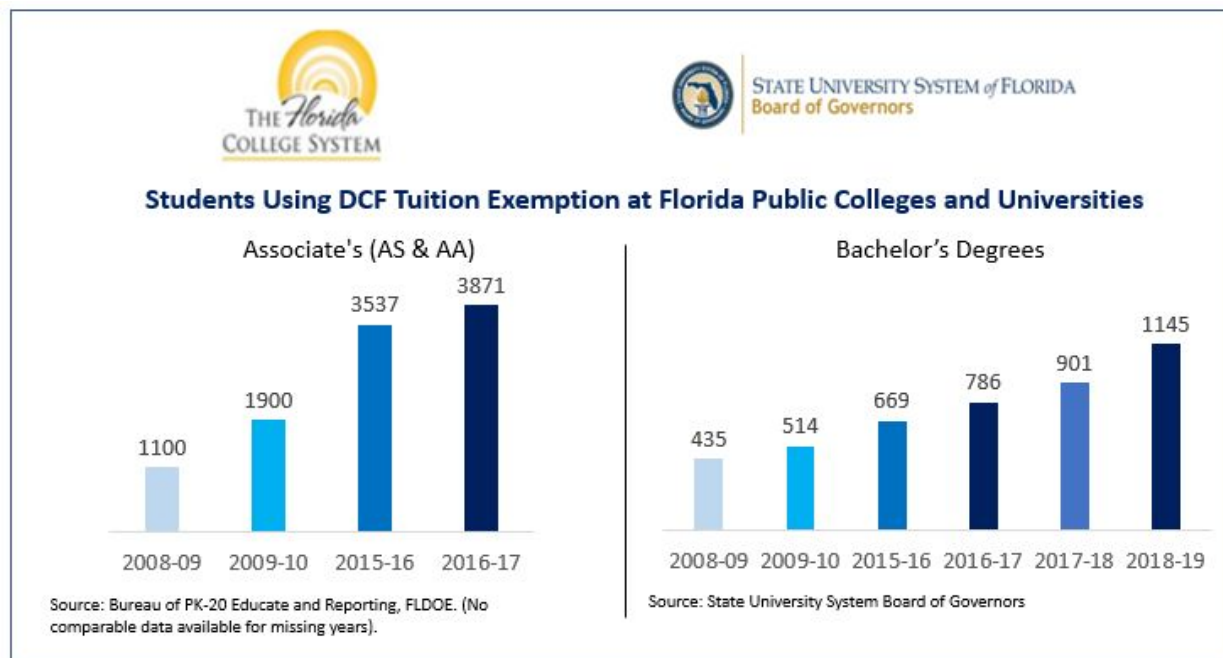
² "Embrace Families CBC will continually monitor spending activities and if needed, will implement a "priority list" order to maximize funds provided. The priority will be placed on youth who are under 18 years of age when funding insurance premiums as they are not able to obtain a Driver's License without insurance. Insurance is not a barrier to those youth who are 18 and over and funding will be available on a case by case basis or as contract funds allow." 2019 Florida Department of Children and Families Keys to Independence Annual Report.

Positive Pathways

In Florida, young adults in Extended Foster Care and Postsecondary Education Services and Supports are eligible for the Florida Department of Children and Families Tuition and Fee Exemption (Exemption).

Positive Pathways, administered by Educate Tomorrow statewide and overseen by the Department's Youth and Young Adult Transition Services Specialist, provides training, technical assistance, and networking opportunities to foster care liaisons, community-based volunteers and professionals, and former foster youth attending post-secondary institutions.

Between 2008 and 2016, the number of students using the Exemption attending institutions in the Florida College System increased from 1,100 to 3,871, a 252% increase. From 2011 and 2017, the number of former foster youth attending State University System Board of Governors (SUS BOG) institutions increased from 435 to 1,145, a 163% increase (see charts below). These increases occurred while the number of young adults exiting care at age 18 remained steady, at nearly 1,000 a year.



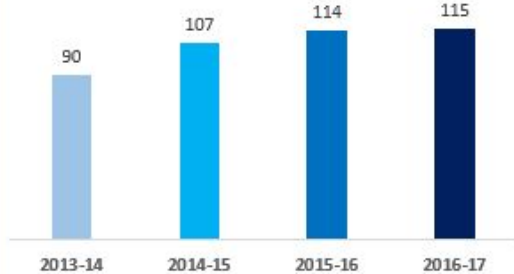
Since the Florida Department of Children and Families (the Department) began supporting statewide initiatives like Florida Reach and Positive Pathways, the graduation rate of former foster youth using the Exemption at public colleges and universities also has increased consistently, from 135 in 2013-2014 to 209 in 2015-2016, a 54% increase in three years (see charts below).



STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM of FLORIDA
Board of Governors

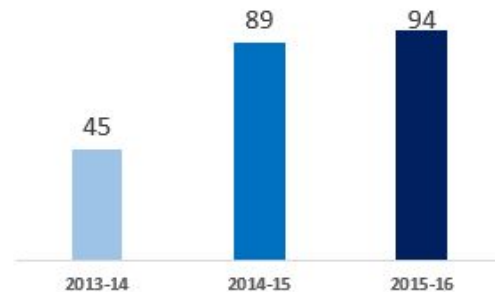
Graduates Using DCF Tuition Exemption at Florida Public Colleges and Universities

Associate's (AS & AA)



Source: Bureau of PK-20 Educate and Reporting, FLDOE

Bachelor's Degrees



Source: State University System Board of Governors

In 2016, the Council recommended that the Department begin to support the work of a volunteer-driven statewide network, Florida Reach, related to campus-based support for students using the tuition and fee exemption. The Council is pleased to say that the Department did so by providing funding for the network's 2016 conference and subsequently establishing Positive Pathways. The Council commends the Department for its three years of support for Positive Pathways, one of the few programs of its kind in the nation.

The Council believes that Positive Pathways has demonstrated its value by meeting the goals and expectations set out by the Department in its contract with Educate Tomorrow. The Council also believes that the need for Positive Pathways will only increase in the future.

Recommendation:

1. The Department continues to fund the Positive Pathways Program, and consider increasing funding to enable program staff to dedicate additional time to data-related efforts.

2019 ILSAC Members

Ashley Friend: QA- Review Specialist, DCF

Cal Walton III: Youth Services Manager, Embrace Families

Dominic Watson: ILSAC Chair, Executive Director, Neighbor to Family

Janelle King: Restorative Practices Specialist, DCF

Jorge Tormes: Lead Attorney, GAL

Nabilah “Naby” Baig: Program Manager, Sunshine Health

Shauntraí Curry: Statewide Transition Coordinator, DJJ

Dr. Steve J. Rios: Senior Director, DCF Positive Pathways Program, Educate Tomorrow

Tara Thompson: Program Director, Camelot Community Care

Thomas Fair: Advocate

Katie Crofoot: Director of Partnerships and Strategic Initiatives, DEO

Andrew Weatherill: Director of Student Support Services, DOE

Warren Davis: Policy Analyst, Career Source Florida

Adam “Shang” Gigliotti – Vice Chair

Anna Zhang

Erik Braun

Special thanks to Ms. Brandie McCabe, Youth & Young Adult Transition Services Specialist, DCF, for her ongoing and unwavering support during all 2019 meetings for the ILSAC.

Department of Children and Families Response to the Independent Living Services Advisory Council 2019 Annual Report

December 31, 2019

Chad Poppell
Secretary



Ron DeSantis
Governor

INTRODUCTION

Since the establishment of the Independent Living Services Advisory Council (the Council) in 2002, the Council has provided recommendations concerning the implementation and operation of independent living services as part of a comprehensive report to the Legislature. As required in s. 409.1451(7), F.S., the Department of Children and Families (department) is submitting responses to the Council's recommendations as part of the Council's 2019 Annual Report.

ILSAC RECOMMENDATION FOR MEMBERSHIP ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE

The department supports the expectations outlined relevant to Council membership but suggests lowering the requirement that the Chair, Co-Chair, and Secretary attend 90 percent of the meetings. If the Council only sets eight meetings for the year and one is missed, they will have theoretically fallen below the 90 percent target, thereby jeopardizing their leadership role.

The department proposes that all Council members attend at least 75 percent of the scheduled meetings and that January's meeting determines the schedule for the calendar year. Any additional Council or subcommittee meetings planned after the schedule is agreed upon, should not count toward the 75 percent.

The department also proposes that the Chair, Co-Chair, and Secretary commit to serving two-years but be allowed to serve a subsequent two-years if unopposed by the Council. The Council should vote on leadership during the January meeting.

ILSAC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EXTENDED FOSTER CARE ALLOWANCE

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE

The department supports the recommendation that the FSFN Payment Reference Guide be updated to revise language regarding allowance and cell phones. The language will be worded in such a way that supports the Council's intent to make allowance a standard payment that allows a young adult to have pocket money to spend on miscellaneous items of their choosing, not specifically based on need. This money will guarantee them an opportunity to practice budgeting. Additionally, payments for cell phones will be moved to a needs category to be considered separately.

The department also intends to clarify in policy guidance that all payments for the cost of supporting a young adult in Extended Foster Care (EFC) should be based on a needs assessment, except for allowance. Expenditures associated with EFC will vary across the state based on supervised living arrangement settings, utility amounts, clothing, childcare, transportation, qualifying activity costs, and personal incidentals. While those expenditures will vary, the allowance will remain a universal set amount yet to be determined.

The department will consider setting the allowance amount to the \$100.00 minimum. If the purpose is to provide equitable distribution of an allowance amount to young adults in EFC that is not based on a cost of care needs assessment, more feedback from stakeholders is required. Any proposed amount will need to go through appropriate department policy review channels, ensuring the solicitation of stakeholder's comments.

ILSAC RECOMMENDATION FOR KEYS TO INDEPENDENCE

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE

The department will consider proposing legislation to expand eligibility for the Keys to Independence program to include young adults while they are participating in Postsecondary Education Services and Support (PESS). If proposed, the department will also ask for increased funding to support the additional PESS population.

ILSAC RECOMMENDATION FOR POSITIVE PATHWAYS

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE

The department recognizes students using the department's tuition and fee exemption (exemption) are comprised of young adults that have exited the foster care system through adoption, guardianship, placement in the custody of a relative or non-relative, or turning 18-years-old while in the department's custody. Students that have experienced foster care need campus-based supports at postsecondary educational institutions to help them succeed in meeting their educational goals.

The department will continue to support the work of Positive Pathways, acknowledging that the number of students utilizing the exemption has increased; thus increasing the number of former foster youth on campuses at Florida's public postsecondary education institutions. The department will explore the appropriate funding sources available to sustain the services administered by Educate Tomorrow through Positive Pathways.