

Senate Bill 551 Policy Memorandum

Issue

Senate Bill 551 focuses too little on the more vulnerable population of foster youth transitioning out of high school into higher education.

Evidence

There are roughly 12,000 children in Oregon's foster system. While a percentage of them will be adopted or placed back in the care of biological family members, many will age out of the system. Statistics do vary by state, but the overall average shows that less than 50 percent of foster youth actually complete high school. Statistics show that Oregon foster children who age-out of the system and choose to attend higher education are minimal. Less than four percent will complete a two-year degree, and only two percent will complete a four-year degree. Nationally, 50 percent of aged-out foster children will be incarcerated within two years, while "transition tool-kits" for aging-out children recommend the military. It is imperative to achieve higher rates of graduation in foster youth, and to assist their transition into higher education.

Recommendation

Add an amendment to Senate Bill 551 that includes an implementation of a similar pilot program in Oregon high schools to assist in foster youth completion, and the transition into higher education.

Alternatives

Amend Senate Bill to mirror Washington's "Passport for Foster Youth"

Create separate bill dedicated specifically for the implementation of a program in Oregon high schools

Leave Senate Bill 551 in its current state

Alternative Analysis

Washington's "Passport for Foster Youth" is a program that was implemented in 2007 and provides support to students from high school through higher education completion. The program includes separate student scholarships beyond state and federal financial assistance, campus incentive funding to post-secondary institutions and a partnership with the College Success Foundation to assist on campus faculty. In the 2014-15 academic year, 376 students were served. Since 2008, the Passport scholarship has been awarded to an average of 325 students annually (Passport for Foster Youth | WSAC. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.wsac.wa.gov/passport-foster-youth>).

Creating a separate bill might create additional fiscal implications but it would also provide for more specificities of orientations and mentorship programs. In addition, having a separate bill would allow for a clear definition of the Oregon Foster Youth Program.

Leaving Senate Bill 551 in its current state would provide the information and requisites for committees required to implement an important program into Oregon's higher education system.

Unintended Consequences

Amending Senate Bill 551 would increase the fiscal impact on high schools in Oregon. The Washington Passport Program estimated \$1,608,576 to serve less than 400 students during their third year of the program. Similarly, a pilot program implemented at a higher education level will also have financial implications as schools will have to hire more staff for orientations and mentorship programs. Overall, the entire passing of Bill 551 may take away from funding from other students' scholarships or federal funding.

Cost-Benefit

Amending Senate Bill 551 would ensure that high schools are equipped to assist foster youth into higher education while also ensuring that more foster youth will have an opportunity to complete a four-year degree. As a result there would be a higher employment rate within Oregon, hypothetically taking pressure

off of the welfare system. In addition, providing a gateway to higher education for foster youth could minimize the percentage who are eventually incarcerated, taking pressure off of federal and state funding.