

BARRIERS TO OBTAINING A DRIVER'S LICENSE FOR VIRGINIA'S FOSTER YOUTH

STUDY PLAN

Study Mandate

- Teens in foster care often face significant barriers to obtaining a driver's license. These young people often miss out on age-appropriate adolescent experiences and opportunities that create a sense of normalcy and help them make a successful transition to adulthood. Foster youth who are forced to wait until adulthood to acquire a driver's license also do not benefit from the extensive safety training provided by graduated driver licensing programs.
- At the Commission's November 8, 2017, meeting, presentations were made on the survey for children aging out of foster care. As part of the presentation, foster care youth gave testimony regarding the difficulty of obtaining a driver's license while in foster care. The Commission decided to investigate this topic during the 2018 study year.

Identified Issues

- Youth who "age out" of the foster care system often face lifetime challenges, including homelessness, incarceration, and low educational attainment. One factor that contributes to these challenges is the lack of a driver's license. Because of concerns about safety, liability, and cost, it is often very difficult for foster youth to get their driver's licenses when their peers do, and most leave care without a license.
- To promote teen driving safety, Virginia has a graduated driver's license program to ensure that young drivers have ample education and experience behind the wheel. Because foster youth often face barriers to completing graduated licensing requirements, many do not apply for their licenses until they are adults, when these safety measures are no longer required.
- Getting a driver's license is a rite of passage that is part of the normal teenage experience. Foster youth who cannot get their licenses get the message that they are "different" or "less than" other teenagers. Child welfare researchers emphasize the importance of promoting normalcy for foster youth as part of a successful transition to adulthood.
- In many areas of Virginia, having a driver's license as an adult is essential for self-sufficiency. Youth who age out of foster care before they have a driver's license find it more difficult to secure housing, find a job, attend college, get important documents, and meet the obligations of adulthood.
- Foster youth face substantial barriers to getting their licenses. These barriers include:
 - Getting permission and assistance from their foster families
 - Paying substantial insurance increases and fees
 - Gaining access to a suitable driving teacher and a car with which to practice
 - Understanding and complying with the licensing process

Study Activities

- Conduct extensive background and literature reviews
 - State Policy and Advocacy Reform Center (SPARC) initiative, “Youth Going Places”
 - Community Based Care of Central Florida
 - Keys to Independence Foster Youth driver’s licensing initiative, Florida
 - Treehouse Driver’s Assistance Program, Washington
 - Legislation enacted or pending in other states
 - Literature on effectiveness of Virginia’s graduated licensing program
 - Foster Youth and Driving Act (H.R. 2512, pending legislation)
 - Virginia guidance on promoting normalcy for youth in foster care (CWSE3030)
 - Family First Prevention Services Act of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018
- Research the process in place in the Virginia foster care system for youth of driving age
- Work with VDSS to identify issues and barriers particular to Virginia
- Conduct round tables with foster youth and youth who have aged out of the foster care system to discuss their experiences regarding getting a driver’s license while in foster care.
- Present at the Great Expectations Conference, May 18, 2018 (Richmond) and gather feedback from foster care youth
- Synthesize findings of literature review and round table discussions
- Develop findings and recommendations
- Present findings and recommendations to the Commission on Youth
- Receive public comment
- Prepare final report