Bill No.: SB-156
Title: AN ACT CONCERNING FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION EXPENSES FOR YOUTH ADOPTED THROUGH THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES FOSTER CARE PROGRAM.
Vote Date: 3/10/2020
Vote Action: Joint Favorable Change of Reference to Appropriations
PH Date: 2/25/2020

Disclaimer: The following JOINT FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.

SPONSORS OF BILL:
Committee on Children

REASONS FOR BILL:
Through the Department of Children and Families foster care program, this bill would expand the policy for financial assistance for post-secondary education expenses to youths adopted on or after January 1, 2001.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:
Vanessa Dorantes, Commissioner, Department of Children and Families

The following comments were made about this bill. Current policies have the Department pay for post-secondary education expenses on behalf of youth who were adopted, through DCF’s foster care program, by the youth’s eighteenth birthday, but eligibility is restricted to cases in which adoption took place after December 31, 2004. The proposed bill would permit children adopted on or after January 1, 2001 to be eligible for similar post-secondary education financial assistance. By passing this bill, it would result significant costs that have not been budgeted for.

Stephanie Cooper, Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity, and Opportunity

This bill is supported. This bill sheds light on adverse childhood experiences and how most foster youth score a 4 or more which correlated to higher risk of health and social problems. When facing this type of life style, protective factors, like school and college, are important to overcome these challenges.
Steven Hernandez, Executive Director, Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity, and Opportunity

The Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity, and Opportunity supports this legislation.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Margaret Doherty, Executive Director, Connecticut Alliance of Foster & Adoptive Families

This bill is supported. They believe that for the youth who have a transfer of guardianship should have the same rights as those who have had an adoption take place. Adoption is being encouraged instead of transfer of guardianship so that the future does not have student loan debt.

Ivy Farinella

This bill is supported. This testimony sheds light on a family’s experience with the adoption process and financial assistance. This testimony explains how a family adopted their daughter and they just missed the cut off to receive financial assistance due to the adoption date. The testimony explains that their daughter is currently in college and is in need of financial assistance because federal financial aid does not cover all of her tuition which has led to loans.

James A. Higgins, MBA

This bill is supported. All adoptive children need to be able to count on Connecticut to help get on the right path for the rest of their lives. With education comes knowledge, and with knowledge comes a better society overall. It is recommended this bill expand more and support a youth’s decision to get any type of training, schooling, or degree even if it is outside of the traditional four-year university degree.

Deborah Kelleher

This bill is supported, but the following revision is recommended. It is recommended that include children adopted after December 31, 2001 be included in the bill. The testimony sheds light on how she adopted her three sons and would not be eligible for this benefit due to when they were adopted. It goes on to shed light on how as one of her sons got older, medical and mental health related issues arose which increased a financial burden and they do not qualify for the support like other adopted children to help them succeed in school.

Nancy and David Asnes

This bill is supported. The testimony sheds light on a family’s struggle financially to give their adopted son the best educational track possible, a therapeutic boarding school, with his
ADHD and RAD. The family expresses how passing this bill would help many families without having to worry about a financial burden.

**Stacy Schleif, Senior Staff Attorney-Child Abuse Project, Center for Children’s Advocacy**

This bill is supported. It is recommended that the bill be revised to allow for youth who experience a permanent transfer of guardianship. It is believed that DCF sites this benefit to families to persuade them to adopt, and it is believed that by doing this many child may have been better served by having legal ties to their biological family through a guardianship arrangement.

**Christopher Scott, Director, SUN Scholars Organization**

This bill is supported. The testimony sheds light on a person’s entry into the foster care system after losing both parents and wishing to attend state schools but was denied which then lead him to pursue an associate degree from a community college. Only 67% of foster youth graduate high school by 18, and only 3% attend college. As a result of this, 15%-20% of foster youth end up homeless or incarcerated by age 21. By opening up the door for more foster and adopted youth to attend college, this bill will combat the conditions that foster and adopted youth are facing.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

**Catherine Williams, Attorney, CT Legal Services, Child Youth Advocacy**

This first part of the bill is supported, but the second part is heavily opposed. The bill is heavily opposed due to the second part of SB 156, Section 1, not being consistent with the stated purpose and harmful to children eligible for adoption through the Department of Children and Families. Children who are still in DCF care when they turn 18 are, by current law, eligible for post-secondary educational support from DCF. CGA § 17a-117 is intended to help encourage and promote the adoption of children in DCF care. It requires DCF to provide subsidies to adoptive parents once DCF determines a child is a special needs child and the adoptive parents meet the standards for adoption. DCF Policy 25-2, as presently written, provides for post-secondary expenses to youth who are adopted through DCF’s foster care program by their 18th birthday; plan to attend an accredited college, university, or institution of higher learning upon completion of high school and; are adopted after December 31, 2004. The second part of SB 156 limits the amount of financial assistance available through DCF substantially, by restricting the amount of funding to no more than the demonstrated financial need as determined by the Federal Student Financial Aid Office (FAFSA). That is a dramatic reduction in the benefits offered under DCF Policy 25-2 to youth who currently qualify for DCF post-secondary education expenses. It is also a disincentive to foster families to adopt children, thereby leaving children in DCF’s expensive foster care system when it is in their best interest to be adopted.