

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5299

AN ACT INCREASING THE AGE FOR ELIGIBILITY FOR THE
POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION FUNDING PROGRAM OFFERED BY THE

Title: DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.

Vote Date: 3/17/2022

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/8/2022

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

Allows for an expansion in funding for the Department of Children and Families' post-secondary education program.

Substitute language:

- Lines 16 and 21: decreases the age until which a youth is eligible from 30 to 26.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Vanessa Dorantes, Commissioner, Department of Children and Families \(DCF\)](#): While the Department of Children and Families "appreciate[s] the intent of this legislation," [H.B. 5299](#) "leaves out the critical component of a case management model of support." The success of elder youth depends on the "support that they receive while achieving post-secondary education," and isn't solely based on "financial assistance provided." [H.B. 5299](#) would "result in a significant unbudgeted cost" due to the roughly "5,000 young adults [that] would be eligible for assistance." In addition, the bill would require the Department of Children and Families to "hire more specialized staff and to fund additional contracts with community providers for support services."

[Nathanael Okpych, Assistant Professor of Social Work, University of Connecticut](#): The Postsecondary Education (PSE) Fund supports foster students by helping to pay their college tuition and "daily living necessities," and without this, studies report that there are "high rates of homelessness, food insecurity, and economic hardships" in young adults. Therefore,

Professor Okpych of the University of Connecticut's School of Social Work supports [H.B. 5299](#) because it would extend the age limit of PSE Funding and allow "foster students a reasonable and realistic amount of time to finish college," as well as providing "sorely needed support to help them to pay for school, meet their basic needs, and ultimately increase their chances of graduating."

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[Larry Backes, Resident, Guilford](#): As a parent of three children, Mr. Backes states that "none of my children were able to finish college and start their lives by 21." Speaking from personal experience, Mr. Backes was 27 when "I realized Engineering was the field I needed to be in." From his time spent working in "corporate America, I can tell you that a bachelor's degree is not better than a high school diploma these days," meaning "young people must be given resources to compete a master's degree and a doctorate." Therefore, Mr. Backes supports [H.B. 5299](#) so that the DCF can provide resources to prospective students and "extend higher education support up to age 30."

[Hartford Foundation for Public Giving](#): The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving supports [H.B. 5299](#) because it serves as a "positive [first] step to increasing the stability and security of young people who have been in DCF care." This piece of legislation would help young people in foster care "lead more stable, independent and fruitful lives." Because young adults leaving DCF care don't have the benefit of familial wealth and resources, they "must balance working to pay for [their] education, housing and other needs with their schoolwork." Due to the rising costs in higher education, young people leaving foster care need additional support beyond the age of 23.

[Susan Myers, President, Connecticut Council on Adoption \(CCA\)](#): The Connecticut Council on Adoption supports [H.B. 5299](#) because many young people "placed for adoption by the Department [of Children and Families] are unable to take advantage of the postsecondary funding program due to the current age criteria." Due to the trauma "related to neglect and abuse leading to their involvement with" DCF, many young people in foster care do not begin and/or complete their education at the same time as their "non-DCF committed peers." This means that many young adults will need additional time to complete their courses if they decide to pursue higher education, and [H.B. 5299](#) would provide them with the necessary resources for those up to 30 years of age.

[Caron Quantick, Resident, Cheshire](#): [H.B. 5299](#) would have a positive impact on young adults who are trying to obtain an education by helping to "cover their tuition costs, fees and supplies, and basic needs" while they are enrolled at an institution. Many students must work while they attend school in order to fund their own education, and "The average time it takes to complete a degree is increasing." Many foster and adopted youth who want to pursue higher education "need support beyond age 21" due to the possibility of "trauma" that they grew up with. Speaking as someone who is currently fostering two children, Ms. Quantick supports [H.B. 5299](#) because "Connecticut is the legal guardian of these young people, and the State should do right by them and try to help them, as a parent would want to."

[Lauren Ruth, Research & Policy Director, Connecticut Voices for Children](#): Nationally, foster youth have a college attendance rate around "20 percent," and "less than five percent" of foster youth have completed college. While the Connecticut Department of Children and

Families helps young adults with their pursuit of higher education by providing "tuition for eligible young people," these programs are only "guaranteed through statute through age 21." Young people in foster care experience "multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)," which can have a detrimental effect on their pursuit of higher education, as well as their physical and mental health. In addition, higher education is expensive, and the "vast majority of young people in foster care do not receive financial assistance from biological family members." The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated issues involving young people in foster care because it caused campuses to close and shut down their programs. Therefore, Connecticut Voices for Children supports [H.B. 5299](#) because "a little extra time is precisely what some youth need to heal, mature, and flourish," and [H.B. 5299](#) has the potential to be a "life-changing piece of legislation."

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

See agency response.

Reported by: Austin Hyatt

Date: 3/22/2022