
Department of Children and Families Response to the Independent Living Services Advisory Council 2018 Annual Report

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INTRODUCTION

Since the establishment of the Independent Living Services Advisory Council (the council) by the 2002 Legislature, the Council has provided recommendations concerning the implementation and operation of independent living services as part of a comprehensive report. As required in s. 409.1451(7), Florida Statutes (F.S.), the Department of Children and Families' (department) is submitting the Independent Living Services Advisory Council 2018 Annual Report, along with the department's responses to each of the recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION SERVICES & SUPPORT (PESS)

1. \$1256 STIPEND: The council has determined the following recommendation for the PESS stipend be adopted. Modify s. 409.1451(2)(B)(1),(3), & (5), F.S., to read "the amount is Florida minimum wage multiplied by 40 hours per week." The set amount of \$1256 is to be stricken from the language. With a set dollar amount written in the statute, a legislative change would be needed each time the amount is changed. With the language stating that the stipend will be calculated by multiplying the Florida minimum wage by 40 hours per week, the amount can be adjusted with the minimum wage adjustment without needing a legislative change each time.

2. FORMALIZED BUDGETING PLAN: Community-Based Care Lead Agencies (CBCs) and case management organizations should be working with young adults on budgeting and ensuring the young adult is financially savvy. A formal, statewide budgeting plan should be developed and used with all young adults transitioning to Independent Living that is evidence-based or has an evidence-informed curriculum.

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE

The department will explore revisions to s. 409.1451, F.S., regarding the amount of financial assistance for young adults participating in PESS. Before reaching a decision as to whether the department will recommend a statutory change to the legislature, consideration must be given to the total federal and state appropriation needed to implement all of Florida's independent living services. For Fiscal Year (FY) 2018-2019, the legislature appropriated approximately \$37 million, an increase of more than \$7.5 million from FY 2017-2018, for the implementation of PESS, Extended Foster Care (EFC), and Aftercare Services. The implementation of Title IV-E EFC will enable the state to draw down Title IV-E dollars to help fund EFC. It is anticipated that \$7.5 million will be made available to help fund Florida's independent living services. An analysis is needed to determine the effects if a specific financial increase is given to assist young adults in PESS. The analysis needs to include the impact on existing EFC and Aftercare Services program funding, and to include consideration of the overall fiscal impact affecting all of Florida's citizens and stakeholders.

The department supports CBCs and their subcontracted direct service providers implementing a budget tool or plan as they work with youth and young adults on becoming financially literate during their transition to independence. Currently, youth under the department's protective supervision are required to receive information offered by the Department of Financial Services (DFS) on a financial literacy curriculum called "Finance Your Future" when they turn 16- and 17-years-old. The curriculum provides core lessons covering subjects such as Budgeting, Saving, Credit Cards, Banking, debt,

and numerous other important areas to maintain a young person's financial health. CBCs and their providers should leverage existing mandates and explore methods for working with young adults in PESS. DFS and the Division of Consumer Services have dedicated a website to providing all Floridians with the resources and information needed to assist in money management:

<https://www.myfloridacfo.com/Ymm/default.aspx>. The department looks forward to working with CBCs on this initiative.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GUARDIAN AD LITEMS REMAINING ON CASES

1. The Guardian ad Litem Program should remain on cases where young adults have aged out and the court has retained jurisdiction, if the young adult still wants guardian ad litem assigned to them.
2. The Guardian ad Litem Program should be available for appointment on cases where a young adult does not currently have a guardian ad litem and the young adult requests guardian ad litem to be appointed for them, as long as the court retains jurisdiction.
3. The Legislature should provide adequate funding to the Guardian ad Litem Program to be able to fulfill this function in addition to its best interest advocacy work on behalf of children under 18 years of age.

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE

The department supports Guardian ad Litem (GAL) assignments for youth and young adults in transition. Supportive adults such as GAL volunteers are essential in an effective transition to independence. The GALs often fulfill a role of mentor, friend, teacher, and coach. Most importantly, the GALs are a positive connection and an effective voice when youth and young adults may not be able to vocalize their needs. Additionally, young adults who readmit to EFC should be provided the opportunity to have a GAL appointed if agreed upon by the young adult. The department is willing to work with the Florida Guardian ad Litem Program to explore the additional resources needed to better bolster and advocate for transitioning youth and young adults under the juvenile court's jurisdiction pursuant to s.39.013, F.S.