

**2007 INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES  
ADVISORY COUNCIL REPORT  
Department of Children and Families Response**

Department of Children and Families

Office of Family Safety

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Secretary

Charlie Crist

Governor

## 2007 Independent Living Advisory Council Report

### Department of Children and Families Response

#### Statutory Authority:

409.1451

7) INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES ADVISORY COUNCIL.--The Secretary of Children and Family Services shall establish the Independent Living Services Advisory Council for the purpose of reviewing and making recommendations concerning the implementation and operation of the independent living transition services. This advisory council shall continue to function as specified in this subsection until the Legislature determines that the advisory council can no longer provide a valuable contribution to the department's efforts to achieve the goals of the independent living transition services.

(a) Specifically, the advisory council shall assess the implementation and operation of the system of independent living transition services and advise the department on actions that would improve the ability of the independent living transition services to meet the established goals. The advisory council shall keep the department informed of problems being experienced with the services, barriers to the effective and efficient integration of services and support across systems, and successes that the system of independent living transition services has achieved. The department shall consider, but is not required to implement, the recommendations of the advisory council.

(b) The advisory council shall report to the appropriate substantive committees of the Senate and the House of Representatives on the status of the implementation of the system of independent living transition services; efforts to publicize the availability of aftercare support services, the Road-to-Independence Program, and transitional support services; the success of the services; problems identified; recommendations for department or legislative action; and the department's implementation of the recommendations contained in the Independent Living Services Integration Workgroup Report submitted to the Senate and the House substantive committees December 31, 2002. This **advisory council report shall be submitted by December 31 of each year that the council is in existence and shall be accompanied by a report from the department which identifies the recommendations of the advisory council and either describes the department's actions to implement these recommendations or provides the department's rationale for not implementing the recommendations.**

(c) Members of the advisory council shall be appointed by the secretary of the department. The membership of the advisory council must include, at a minimum, representatives from the headquarters and district offices of the

Department of Children and Family Services, community-based care lead agencies, the Agency for Workforce Innovation, the Department of Education, the Agency for Health Care Administration, the State Youth Advisory Board, Workforce Florida, Inc., the Statewide Guardian Ad Litem Office, foster parents, recipients of Road-to-Independence Program funding, and advocates for foster children. The secretary shall determine the length of the term to be served by each member appointed to the advisory council, which may not exceed 4 years.

(d) The Department of Children and Family Services shall provide administrative support to the Independent Living Services Advisory Council to accomplish its assigned tasks. The advisory council shall be afforded access to all appropriate data from the department, each community-based care lead agency, and other relevant agencies in order to accomplish the tasks set forth in this section. The data collected may not include any information that would identify a specific child or young adult.

### **Legislative Recommendations**

**The legislature should:**

- 1. Continue to allocate general revenue funds in addition to the minimum match to maximize federal funding and approve and appropriate the request of the department of Children and Families for an additional \$16,829,507 in General Revenue for Independent Living Services needs.**

Department Response: The Department appreciates the support of the Independent Living Advisory Council.

- 2. Revision of 409.1451 (3) (a) 3 to include all youth in out-of-home care and to insure participation in age appropriate activities.**

Department Response: The Department's interpretation of current statute is that children living in group care settings are already entitled to participate in age appropriate or normalcy activities. The clarification of the statute specifying that all children in state custody or licensed care will help to ensure greater understanding of this requirement.

### **Department Recommendations**

**The Department should:**

- 1. ILSAC recommends that a quality assurance report is maintained for EVERY youth receiving Independent Living Services.**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. The Department will convene members of the ILSAC along with Department and community-based care staff and advocates to develop a recommended approach for addressing this recommendation. The Quality and Accountability Workgroup will address several of the recommendations found later in this response.

**2. ILSAC recommends that DCF ensure that technical assistance resources are available to Community Based Care agencies and contracted providers.**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. The Department will include the development of a plan for providing technical assistance throughout 2008 as part of the workgroup addressing quality and accountability issues.

**3. ILSAC recommends that the quality assurance efforts of DCF for Independent Living Services not be established as a policing role. Rather ILSAC recommends that DCF consider establishing a technical assistance and quality assurance system that works with Community Based Care Agencies and contracted providers to implement cost effective and efficient programs specific to the needs and resources in their communities.**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. See recommendation #2.

**4. DCF in their role as the ultimate agent responsible for the wellbeing of youth in their care must establish provider accountability by implementing corrective actions as part of the ongoing quality assurance process. A system of effective Independent Living Services will only be provided to our youth in foster care if quality assurance feedback and effective corrective action measures are utilized.**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. The Department will provide members of ILSAC with the opportunity to meet with contract management and program leadership regarding the development, implementation and oversight of the contract template for community-based care lead agencies. During this meeting, the Department will describe existing feedback and corrective action measures and determine if improvements can be made specific to this service delivery system.

**5. ILSAC recommends that DCF should continue to work with stakeholders to refine the program planning and delivery reporting**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. The Department will continue to partner with members of ILSAC, the Florida Coalition for Children, and other stakeholders to ensure implementation of performance measures based on outcomes for the 2008-09 contract year. This group may also be the appropriate group to accomplish recommendation #4 above.

- 6. DCF must take the lead role and establish clear Independent Living services policies, procedures and standards of service as a requirement of every Community Based Care Agency or other agency contracted to provide Independent Living and Transition Services.**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. The quality and accountability workgroup will also address the need for policy clarification. As of July 1, 2007, the contract template for community-based care lead agencies includes, "Minimum Standards for Independent Living Transition Services". The group will use this document, this 2007 report, federal and state law, and administrative code to determine priority policy needs.

- 7. DCF must ensure that life skills trainings, education planning, career path development, financial literacy training and other services mandated by Florida statute are of the same quality regardless of the placement of the youth in Florida's foster care system or the location of the contracted provider.**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. These issues span the scope of both the quality and accountability group and the existing outcome measures group identified in recommendation # 5. The Department will determine the best approach for addressing this need through one or both of these groups.

- 8. DCF must ensure that every Community Based Care Agency or other contracted providers meet benchmarks-not of services provided or youth served, but of outcomes achieved by youth participating in Independent Living Services.**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. See recommendations # 5 above.

- 9. Continue to use the Strengthening Youth Partnerships (SYP) venue to support increased funding of grants from participating agencies that focus on engaging local CBC's and RWBs in partnerships to address the employment and training needs of foster youth.**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. Strengthening Youth Partnerships provides a cross agency collaborative approach to addressing this need. The Department will continue its support and participation.

- 10. Continue to use the SYP venue to increase cross-agency collaboration among state and local organizations to enhance the knowledge of professionals working with foster youth.**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. See recommendation # 9.

- 11. The Department should expand its efforts with appropriate state agencies/ organizations to ensure that foster care providers and foster youth are aware of and encourage foster youth to access available educational and employment services through the Regional Workforce Boards, their local websites and the One-Stop Career Centers.**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. The Department will collaborate with the Florida Coalition for Children and the Florida Foster Adoptive Parent Association to address this need.

- 12. Continue to support the previously recommended actions steps of the NGA /Florida Team regarding housing.**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation which states that youth transitioning out of foster care should have access to safe, stable, affordable housing near public transportation, school, or work. See additional information in response to # 13.

- 13. Continue to support the development and implementation of a transitional living or subsidized independent living housing experience for those youth aging out of foster care at age 17 who will not have the option of remaining in a foster care family home or group home to insure a smoother transition to independent living.**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. The Department's Offices of Homelessness and Family Safety will collaborate with the Florida Coalition for Children and ILSAC to support this vital service. In addition, the Department has submitted a Legislative Budget Request of \$2,000,000 to address this critical need.

**14. Support the development of transitional housing programs and scattered site apartments with support services for youth ages 18-23.**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. See recommendation #13.

**15. ILSAC continues to recommend the development and implementation of electronic benefit transfer options for allowances, aftercare or RTI payments.**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. The Department will collaborate with the Florida Coalition for Children to identify barriers to implementation and strategize solutions.

**16. The ILSAC recommends that over the next year DCF consider the legal and fiscal implications of aligning the RTI with the education system and require individualized and comprehensive transitional support services, including a written transitional services plan for all youth who have reached the age of 18, however have not obtained their high school diploma or GED.**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. The Department will convene a group of stakeholders to analyze and explore the unique challenges facing young adults formerly in foster care working on their high school diploma or GED.