

DCF LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY



3/17/2021

TESTIMONY OF

Tanya Keys, Deputy Secretary
Kansas Department for Children and Families

TESTIMONY ON

SB 32

Chair

Huebert

Vice Chair

Thomas

Ranking Member

Stogsdill

and

Members of the Committee

SUMMARY OF ISSUE & DCF POSITION

Senate Bill 32 would amend statutes related to dual and concurrent enrollment programs in Kansas. One piece of the bill would expand the Kansas Foster Child Educational Assistance Program to provide a tuition waiver for foster care students in high school who are concurrently or dually enrolled in a postsecondary institution.

While DCF supports the intent of SB 32 to expand the tuition waiver options available to students in foster care, the agency is neutral on the bill due to the unknown fiscal impact of tuition waiver expansion.

CONTEXT & HISTORY

DCF currently provides postsecondary education assistance through the Kansas Foster Care Educational Assistance Program, also known as the Tuition Waiver Program. The tuition waiver is available to youth who are enrolled at a Kansas Board of Regents post-secondary institution (university, community college, technical program) and meet one of the following criteria:

- In the custody of DCF and in a foster care placement on the date the youth attained 18 years of age; or
- Released from custody of DCF prior to attaining 18 years of age, after having graduated from high school or fulfilled the requirements for a GED while in foster care placement and the custody of DCF; or
- Adopted from a foster care placement on or after the youth's 16th birthday; or
- Left a foster care placement subject to a permanent custodianship or guardianship under chapter 38 or 59 of the Kansas Statutes Annotated.

For students who qualify for the Tuition Waiver Program, educational institutions waive the costs of tuition and associated fees. Youth remain eligible for the Tuition Waiver through the semester in which they turn 23, as long as they remain in good standing at the educational institution and are making satisfactory progress toward completing the educational program (as defined and monitored by the institution).

DCF approved 264 applications for the tuition waiver program in FY 2020. It is important to keep in mind that postsecondary education programs typically take multiple years to complete, so the number of approved applications for a fiscal year does not reflect total participation as some of those approved in previous fiscal years are still in the process of completing their programs.

EFFECT OF LEGISLATION

Senate Bill 32 would expand the existing Tuition Waiver Program to allow foster youth who are concurrently or dually enrolled in a postsecondary education institution to make use of the waiver. DCF supports this effort to expand educational supports to students in foster care. This would enable foster youth in high school to use the waiver to take college courses at no cost, giving them a head start on their postsecondary education.

The bill would also require the Board of Regents to compile and prepare reports on concurrent/dual enrollment numbers to be submitted to the House and Senate Education Committees each year. This report would include the number of students in foster care making use of the tuition waiver. DCF appreciates these efforts to provide the legislature additional data related to foster students.

FISCAL IMPACT OF LEGISLATION

The Kansas Board of Regents funds the Kansas Foster Care Educational Assistance Program by waiving the costs of eligible students in foster care attending their institutions. DCF assumes all reporting and fiscal impact from this proposed legislation would be to the Board of Regents. The Board of Regents state that they cannot estimate the cost of the expansion of the Kansas Foster Care Educational Assistance Program but that it could lead to an unknown decrease in tuition revenue.

DCF whole heartedly supports SB 32's intention to increase educational supports for students in foster care. However, we are also wary of the unknown cost of expanding the tuition waiver program at a time when the state's fiscal situation is delicate.

DCF POSITION

DCF remains neutral on Senate Bill 32 at this time. The uncertain fiscal impact of the bill is a major issue given the state's fiscal position. DCF stands ready to engage with the author of this bill and relevant stakeholders to discuss expansion of the tuition waiver program. We look forward to those conversations.