



## Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #642

### Foster Youth Programs (UW System)

[LFB 2021-23 Budget Summary: Page 609, #14]

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#### CURRENT LAW

Currently, UW Eau Claire, UW-Green Bay, UW-Milwaukee, UW-River Falls, UW-Stout and UW-Whitewater offer "Fostering Success" programs which provide guidance and resources for youth who have been in foster care, homeless, or orphaned and who have an interest in pursuing higher education. The programs inform students about available grants and scholarships as well as provide supplemental advising about courses and connect students to available resources, including housing, food, clothing, transportation, health and wellness, and employment.

#### DISCUSSION POINTS

1. The Governor's proposal would provide \$500,000 GPR annually in a new, annual appropriation for foster youth support programs. The Board of Regents would be required to allocate funding from this appropriation to each institution to establish or maintain support programs for students enrolled in the institution who formerly resided in a foster home or group home. The types of programs supported by these funds may include any of the following: (a) scholarships; (b) employment; (c) emergency funds; (d) basic supplies; (e) mentorships to assist with academic preparations and successful navigation of the complex college environment; or (f) other resources such as career planning, financial literacy training, and math and writing support.

2. While many states have tuition-waiver programs that allow foster youth to attend public institutions at no charge or for significantly reduced rates, there is no such program in Wisconsin, nor are there any state scholarships targeted specifically to students who were formerly in foster care. 2017 Assembly Bill 777 would have created a tuition remission program for foster care students at UW System and the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS). The bill would have required the Board of Regents and WTCS district boards to grant tuition remissions to students who had been

placed in foster care or other placements out of their parent's home. The bill would have provided \$410,000 GPR annually in a biennial appropriation to reimburse UW System and WTCS institutions for remissions. The bill passed the Assembly on a vote of 93 to 0, but failed to pass pursuant to 2017 Senate Joint Resolution 1.

3. Although Wisconsin does not offer state-funded tuition remission or scholarships directly targeted to students who were in foster care, the federal Chafee Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program, funded under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, provides vouchers for post-secondary education and training available to youths who have aged out of out-of-home care. Wisconsin received \$755,000 from the ETV program for federal fiscal year 2021. Youths may receive services funded under ETV if they meet state eligibility criteria for the independent living program and federal ETV eligibility requirements, which Department of Children and Family (DCF) staff note is a more limited population than all youth who have experienced foster care. A youth is eligible for the ETV program if he or she exited an out-of-home care or court-ordered kinship care placement at age 18 or went into court-ordered guardianship or was adopted after the age of 16. All ETV funds are awarded under the Brighter Star program through the transitional resource agencies.

4. Through federal fiscal year 2020, eligible youth receive up to \$5,000 per school year in ETV funds for financial aid for the costs of attending an accredited school for a four-year degree, two-year degree, technical diploma, apprenticeship, or professional certification. Funds may be available for up to five academic years. The awards may be used for the costs of attendance, including (but not limited to) tuition, fees, room and board, and transportation for youths who have been approved to attend a post-secondary education or vocational program. A student is eligible if he or she: (a) is at least 17.5 years old and is likely to remain in a court-ordered out-of-home care placement until the age of 18 (or older); (b) was adopted or entered guardianship under the Children's Code at the age of 16 or older following a court-ordered out-of-home care placement; or (c) is older than 18 but younger than 14 years of age and aged out of an out-of-home care placement. Beginning in federal fiscal year 2021, the federal Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 increased the maximum ETV award amount from \$5,000 per youth per year to be up to \$12,000 per youth per year and raised the maximum age of eligibility to 26.

5. Research suggests a small percentage of individuals formerly in foster care attend post-secondary education and only a small percentage of those students receive degrees within five or six years. The Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago conducted a longitudinal study, the Midwest Study, of individuals who had formerly been in foster care in Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin. At the beginning of the study, all of the individuals were 17 years old and had been in foster care for at least one year. The first round of interviews began in 2002 and subsequent interviews occurred when most of the respondents were 19, 21, 23 or 24, and 26. Chapin Hall released separate reports for each of the three states following the interviews that took place when the individuals formerly in foster care were 19 and 21. At age 19, 16.5% of individuals who had formerly been in foster care in Wisconsin were enrolled in a vocational training program or a two-year college while 6.7% were enrolled in a four-year college or university. At age 21, 10.8% were enrolled in a two-year college and 5.7% were enrolled in a four-year college or university. Data from all three states shows that 8.1% of respondents were enrolled in a two-year college and 4.2% were enrolled in a four-year college or university at age 23 or 24.

6. As the Chapin Center notes, while the ETV (Brighter Star) and tuition waiver programs in other states make postsecondary education more economically viable for young people aging out of foster care, they do not address nonfinancial needs. DOA budget staff indicate that the proposed funding was intended to be utilized for supporting and expanding the Fostering Success programs. The Fostering Success programs at several UW-System institutions support students who have been in foster care (and other students who have experienced homelessness or were orphaned) by focusing on recruitment, retention, and graduation. The initial program began at UW-Stout in the admissions office through a one-time grant in 2014 from DCF and continued in subsequent years primarily through private donations. As part of their Fostering Success program, UW-Stout provides information for other campuses interested in developing their own Fostering Success programs.

7. Funding for Fostering Success programs varies by campus. At UW-Stout, the program partners with the campus's student support services funded through federal TRIO grants, which provide academic support and services for first-generation students, students who meet federal low-income criteria, and students with disabilities. These services include financial literacy coaching, writing and math specialists, and tutoring. By partnering with the TRIO program, UW-Stout's director indicates the minimum annual Fostering Success program operating budget is approximately \$15,000. The program director indicates over 80% of program funds are utilized for activities that directly benefit students including scholarships, paid work positions within the program, emergency funds, and basic supplies (hygiene, clothes, food, and school supplies). Budgeted staff time by the Fostering Success Director and Support Services advisor together make up a 0.10 FTE position funded through UW-Stout through private donations to the Stout Foundation for Fostering Success. UW-Stout also provides GPR funding for a 0.05 FTE administrative support, and provides funding for the program through federal work-study funds and a graduate assistant position funded from program revenue (tuition) funds which the program applies for on an annual basis. Community grants and private donations provide the remaining program funding. If the program were not partnered with TRIO, the director estimates annual costs would be approximately \$100,000 annually.

8. At UW-Milwaukee, the program coordinator indicates that 25% of their position, which is funded through GPR, is allocated to the Fostering Success coordinator work, and that the program has no other dedicated budget and relies heavily on volunteers and donations. The coordinator is responsible for leading the Fostering Success at UWM Committee, a group of volunteers which includes faculty, alumni, and community members. They also coordinate student outreach to both prospective and current students through monthly emails, phone call campaigns, and college and career fairs. They also manage donation campaigns and apply for grants to support the program (the program receives grants and donations of between \$5,000 and \$10,000 annually). Similar to Stout, and depending on available donations, the UWM program provides academic and wellness supplies to students including welcome bags, book gift cards, and linens. There are several activities that UWM would like to provide through their program if they were to receive additional program funding, such as a one to two-night summer camp for high school students (a program UW-Stout currently offers through their program), foster care awareness month activities, scholarship funding, and peer mentors and professional in-depth coaches to help students navigate life transitions into college, throughout college, and post-graduation.

9. Given the timing of enactment of the state's budget, the funding amount in 2021-22 could be set at \$250,000 with the expectation that the proposed activities would begin in the second semester of the 2021-22 academic year. Under this approach, \$250,000 would be provided in 2021-22 and \$500,000 in 2022-23.

## ALTERNATIVES

1. Provide \$500,000 annually in a new, annual appropriation for foster youth support programs. Require the Board of Regents to allocate funding from this appropriation to each institution to establish or maintain support programs for students enrolled in the institution who formerly resided in a foster home or group home. Specify that the types of programs supported by these funds may include any of the following: (a) scholarships; (b) employment; (c) emergency funds; (d) basic supplies; (e) mentorships to assist with academic preparations and successful navigation of the complex college environment; or (f) other resources such as career planning, financial literacy training, and math and writing support.

<b>ALT 1</b>	<b>Change to Base</b>
GPR	\$1,000,000

2. Provide \$250,000 in 2021-22 and \$500,000 in 2022-23 in a new annual appropriation for foster youth support programs. Require the Board of Regents to allocate funding from this appropriation to each institution to establish or maintain support programs for students enrolled in the institution who formerly resided in a foster home or group home. Specify that the types of programs supported by these funds may include any of the following: (a) scholarships; (b) employment; (c) emergency funds; (d) basic supplies; (e) mentorships to assist with academic preparations and successful navigation of the complex college environment; or (f) other resources such as career planning, financial literacy training, and math and writing support.

<b>ALT 2</b>	<b>Change to Base</b>
GPR	\$750,000

3. Take no action.

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