

SUBJECT: Ensuring college credit eligibility for completion of the PAL program

COMMITTEE: Human Services — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 8 ayes — Frank, Hinojosa, Hull, Klick, Meza, Noble, Rose, Shaheen

0 nays

1 absent — Neave

WITNESSES: For — Brenda Woolley, Texas Network of Youth Services; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Alison Mohr Boleware, National Association of Social Workers - Texas Chapter; Adriana Kohler, Texans Care for Children; Jamie McCormick, Texas Alliance of Child and Family Services; Jennifer Biundo, Texas Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy and Collaborative For Youth In Care; Sarah Crockett, Texas CASA; Michelle Wittenburg, Texas Public Charter Schools Association; Kerrie Judice, TexProtects; Molly Weiner, United Ways of Texas; Thomas Parkinson)

Against — None

On — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Liz Kromrei, Department of Family and Protective Services)

BACKGROUND: Family Code sec. 264.121 governs the Transitional Living Services Program, which is administered by the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) to assist youth who are between 14 and 21 years of age and are currently or were formerly in foster care in transitioning from foster care to independent living. The transitional program provides Preparation for Adult Living Program (PAL) services, which include independent living skills assessments, short-term financial assistance, basic self-help skills, and life skills development and training regarding money management, health and wellness, job skills, planning for the future, housing and transportation, and interpersonal skills.

Under this section, DFPS was required to develop and report to the

Legislature by December 1, 2018, a plan to standardize the curriculum for the PAL program that ensured that the youth enrolled in the program received relevant and age appropriate information and training.

Concerns have been raised that only a fraction of foster youth eligible for a state program providing a tuition and fee waiver are taking advantage of that program. There have been calls to ensure that such youths have the opportunity to begin using the waiver and obtaining college credits for completion of the PAL program while still in DFPS care.

DIGEST: HB 700 would the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), in coordination with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, to establish a work group to develop a plan to ensure that foster youth who completed the standardized curriculum for the Preparation for Adult Living Program (PAL) were eligible to receive college credit for completion of the program.

The work group would have to include representatives from urban and rural institutions of higher education. In developing its evidence-based recommendations, the work group would be required to consider the feasibility of implementing each recommendation, a foster youth's access to the PAL program, and the average length of time a foster youth would remain in a placement.

DFPS would be required to report the plan to the Legislature by November 1, 2022.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2021, and its provisions would expire on September 1, 2023.