

Committee on Children, Families, and Elder Affairs

CS/SB 7034 — Child Welfare

by Appropriations Committee and Children, Families, and Elder Affairs Committee

The bill makes three important changes to current law aimed at benefiting the lives of children in foster care.

First, the bill increases the monthly payment amounts for relative and nonrelative caregivers who have children placed with them in out-of-home care to achieve parity with the rates for Level II through Level V family foster home placements under the following circumstances:

- For caregivers who have obtained licensure as a child-specific Level I foster placement who have a child placed with them, regardless of whether a court has found that the child is dependent, from the time the child is placed in their care until the child reaches permanency.
- For caregivers, regardless of whether they have obtained a child-specific Level I license, who have a dependent child placed with them, from the date the child is found to be dependent or from the date the child is placed with them, whichever is later, for a period of not more than 6 months or until the child achieves permanency, whichever occurs first. This provision ensures that the 6 month timeline for licensure only begins once two circumstances are satisfied, including both that the child has been found to be dependent and that the child has actually been placed with the relative or nonrelative.

Additionally, the bill provides that relatives or nonrelatives who do not obtain licensure as a child-specific Level I foster placement within 6 months from the specified date will receive a monthly payment less than the \$333 monthly payment provided to a participant enrolled in the Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP) as determined by rule and will be applicable until the child achieves permanency or the relative or nonrelative caregiver obtains licensure as a child-specific Level I foster placement, whichever occurs first.

The bill also provides a \$200 per month per child subsidy to any foster parents and relative and nonrelative caregivers who have a child placed in their home between the ages of birth to school entry regardless of whether the caregiver is licensed or not. The subsidy may be provided as long as the child is placed in out-of-home care with the caregiver and is the subject of an open dependency proceeding.

Lastly, the bill expands the scope of potential students eligible for a tuition and fee exemption at a workforce education program, a Florida College System institution or a state university, to certain students who have been the subject of a shelter, dependency, or termination of parental rights proceeding, and who:

- Is in a Temporary Assistance for Needy Families relative caregiver placement at the time he or she reached 18 years of age;
- After reaching 14 years of age, spent at least 18 months in out-of-home care and were then reunited with his or her parents who were the subject of the dependency proceeding before reaching 18 years of age; and

- Were placed in a permanent guardianship and remains in such guardianship either until the student either reaches 18 years of age or, if before reaching 18 years of age, he or she enrolls in an eligible institution.

The bill is expected to have a significant recurring fiscal impact on state government expenditures.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2022.

Vote: Senate 39-0; House 112-0