

Committee on Children, Families, And Elder Affairs

SB 404 — Transition to Adulthood Services

by Senator Wise

The bill makes changes to ch. 985, F.S., relating to juvenile justice, to provide transition-to-adulthood services to older youth who are in the custody of, or under the supervision of, the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ).

The bill requires that transition-to-adulthood services for a youth be part of an overall plan leading to the total independence of the child from DJJ's supervision. Specifically, the plan must include:

- A description of the child's skills and a plan for learning additional identified skills;
- The behavior that the child has exhibited which indicates an ability to be responsible and a plan for developing additional responsibilities;
- The provision for future educational, vocational, and training skills;
- Present financial and budgeting capabilities and a plan for improving resources and abilities;
- A description of the proposed residence;
- Documentation that the child understands the specific consequences of his or her conduct in such a program;
- Documentation of proposed services to be provided by DJJ and other agencies, including the type of services and the nature and frequency of contact; and
- A plan for maintaining or developing relationships with family, other adults, friends, and the community.

The bill also provides that youth who are adjudicated delinquent and are in the legal custody of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCF) may, if eligible, receive DCF's independent living transition services pursuant to s. 409.1451, F.S. Adjudication of delinquency may not be considered, by itself, as disqualifying criteria for eligibility in DCF's Independent Living Program.

The bill also permits a court to retain jurisdiction for a year beyond the child's 19th birthday if he or she is participating in the transition-to-adulthood program. The bill provides that the transition services created in s. 985.461, F.S., require voluntary participation by affected youth and are not intended to create an extension of involuntary court-sanctioned residential commitment.

Additionally, the bill creates the College-Preparatory Boarding Academy Pilot Program (Academy) for at-risk students. The bill defines the key elements of the program and establishes "at-risk" student eligibility criteria consistent with eligibility standards for a range of non-educational federal and state programs that support needy families, children, and youth. Specifically, the bill provides that an "eligible student" is a student who is a resident of the state and entitled to attend school, is at risk of academic failure, is currently enrolled in grade 5 or 6, is

from a family whose income is below 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines, and who meet at least two additional risk factors, which are specified in the bill.

The bill outlines a process for the State Board of Education (SBE) to select an experienced, qualified operator (through a request for proposals process) and prescribes the qualifications and obligations of the operator. The bill also stipulates the contract requirements between the SBE and the selected operator.

The bill authorizes the program to receive funding from non-education sources and requires the SBE to coordinate, streamline, and simplify requirements to eliminate duplicate, redundant, or conflicting requirements to which the academy is subjected. The bill authorizes the operator of the Academy to bill Medicaid for services rendered to eligible students.

The bill directs the Academy to enroll up to 80 students beginning in August 2012, and to grow to a student capacity of 400 students. It also requires the SBE to issue an annual report for each college-preparatory boarding academy. Finally, the bill authorizes the SBE to adopt rules to administer the pilot program.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2011.

Vote: Senate 38-1; House 118-1