

26 addition to other specified training; authorizing the
27 development of such training by or in collaboration
28 with specified entities; providing construction;
29 requiring the department to develop and provide
30 trauma-informed training to mentors; requiring the
31 department to provide assistance with the program's
32 administrative and procedural requirements to
33 interested foster youth; requiring the department to
34 publicize internship opportunities and inform foster
35 youth of where to locate the information; requiring
36 the department to assess the career interests of
37 foster youth; requiring the department to ensure
38 internships comply with the Fair Labor Standards Act;
39 requiring the department to collaborate with specified
40 entities to establish a system by a specified date for
41 secondary institutions to award college credits;
42 requiring the department to conduct follow-up
43 interviews with participating foster youth within a
44 specified timeframe and for a specified purpose;
45 requiring the department to submit data from such
46 interviews by a specified date annually for inclusion
47 in a specified report; requiring the department to
48 gather and compile feedback from mentors assigned to
49 participating foster youth or personnel from
50 participating agencies for a specified purpose;

51 requiring the department to submit compiled mentor
52 feedback by a specified date annually for inclusion in
53 a specified report; requiring the department to
54 collaborate with the Florida Institute for Child
55 Welfare in preparation of an annual report; requiring
56 approved agencies to provide and monthly update a list
57 of open employment opportunities for which eligible
58 foster youth may apply; requiring approved agencies to
59 offer foster youth priority consideration under
60 certain circumstances; requiring approved agencies to
61 recruit mentors to work with participating foster
62 youth employed through the program; providing
63 requirements for such mentors; specifying payment
64 procedures and requirements for mentors; requiring
65 approved agencies to implement certain procedures
66 before discharging foster youth; requiring approved
67 agencies to provide feedback and collaborate in
68 preparation of a specified report; limiting the
69 timeframe for foster youth participation in the
70 internship program; authorizing the continued
71 employment of foster youth under certain conditions;
72 specifying conditions of employment for foster youth
73 as interns; requiring a foster youth to meet
74 eligibility requirements at the time of applying for
75 an internship position; requiring foster youth to

76 complete specified training within certain timeframes;
77 authorizing the department or designated lead agencies
78 or subcontracted providers to determine if an
79 interested foster youth needs to complete training
80 before applying; requiring that foster youth be
81 classified as other-personal-services employees;
82 specifying prerequisite conditions for discharging a
83 foster youth intern; limiting the number of hours per
84 week a foster youth may work; requiring foster youth
85 to spend certain stipend funds for specific purposes
86 and comply with certain dress code requirements;
87 applying employment protections to foster youth
88 employed through the internship program; excluding
89 compensation earned under the internship program from
90 the definition of earned income for calculating
91 economic self-sufficiency benefits; specifying
92 requirements and conditions for foster youth to earn
93 college credit for work performed in the internship
94 program; granting postsecondary educational
95 institutions with discretion to determine
96 administrative compliance requirements; requiring
97 approved agencies to cooperate with postsecondary
98 educational institutions to provide specified
99 information; requiring the Florida Institute for Child
100 Welfare to submit an annual report to the Governor and

101 the Legislature within a certain timeframe; providing
 102 requirements for the report; requiring the department
 103 and approved agencies to adopt rules; amending s.
 104 414.56, F.S.; revising the duties of the Office of
 105 Continuing Care within the department to include
 106 establishing and operating an internship program;
 107 providing appropriations; providing an effective date.

108

109 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

110

111 Section 1. Section 409.1455, Florida Statutes, is created
 112 to read:

113 409.1455 Internship program for foster youth.-

114 (1) SHORT TITLE.-This section may be cited as the "Step
 115 Into Success Act."

116 (2) CREATION.-There is established the Step Into Success
 117 internship program to be administered by the department for
 118 eligible foster youth to develop essential workforce and
 119 professional skills in furtherance of their careers, to
 120 transition from the custody of the department to independent
 121 living, and to become best prepared for an independent and
 122 successful future. The establishment of this program must
 123 include qualified designated personnel whose responsibilities
 124 are to provide the required services to approved agency liaison
 125 personnel and eligible foster youth in accordance with this

126 section. An eligible foster youth must receive priority
127 consideration for any internship positions as provided under
128 this section.

129 (3) DEFINITIONS.—For purposes of this section, the term:

130 (a) "Approved agency" means one of the following agencies
131 that may participate in the internship program by employing
132 eligible foster youth:

133 1. The Department of Children and Families;

134 2. The Department of Health;

135 3. The Agency for Health Care Administration;

136 4. The Department of Education;

137 5. The Department of Environmental Protection;

138 6. The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission; and

139 7. The Division of the State Fire Marshal within the

140 Department of Financial Services.

141 (b) "Community-based care lead agency" has the same
142 meaning as in s. 409.986(3) (d).

143 (c) "Florida Institute for Child Welfare" means the
144 institute established within the Florida State University
145 College of Social Work under s. 1004.615.

146 (d) "Foster youth" means an individual older than 16 years
147 of age but younger than 26 years of age who is currently or was
148 previously placed in foster care within this state.

149 (e) "Priority consideration" means the approved agency
150 must invite a foster youth who is eligible to participate in the

151 internship program to be interviewed for any position for which
152 he or she meets the minimum qualifications.

153 (4) PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS OF THE DEPARTMENT.—The department
154 shall establish an internship program for foster youth which
155 begins operations on or before January 1, 2023, and complies
156 with all of the following requirements:

157 (a) Designate and ensure that there is sufficient
158 qualified staff to implement and maintain operation of the
159 internship program.

160 (b) By November 1, 2022, prepare written educational and
161 training materials for foster youth, including a toolkit to
162 explain the internship program process, resources to assist in
163 participating in the internship and entering the professional
164 workforce, and guidance on securing an internship position and
165 update the material thereafter at least once annually. Resources
166 may include, but are not limited to, workshops and materials to
167 assist with preparing resumes and staff assistance with securing
168 internship positions.

169 (c) Provide all relevant training and written materials on
170 the internship program to designated personnel within the
171 approved agencies and any other relevant tools to such agencies
172 to ensure successful participation in the program.

173 (d) Provide written materials to foster youth to ensure
174 that all such youth are informed of the requirements for
175 participating in the program and the contact information for the

176 program office. All community-based care lead agencies shall
177 ensure that any subcontracted providers that directly serve
178 youth are also provided with the training and written materials.

179 (e) Advertise and promote the availability of the
180 internship program to engage as many eligible foster youths as
181 possible.

182 (f) Provide to eligible foster youth a minimum of 2 hours
183 of training relating to interview skills and a minimum of 4
184 hours of training relating to professional and leadership
185 development skills that are relevant to performing the functions
186 required of the positions offered by participating approved
187 agencies. The training required in this paragraph must be
188 provided in addition to any other life skills or employment
189 training required by law and may be developed or administered by
190 the department, community-based care lead agencies, or the lead
191 agencies' subcontracted providers or through collaboration with
192 the approved agencies, colleges or universities, or non-profit
193 organizations in the community that have workforce training
194 resources. This paragraph may not be construed to limit the
195 number of hours of training offered in which a foster youth may
196 participate.

197 (g) Develop and provide a minimum of 1 hour of trauma-
198 informed training to mentors who serve under this section to
199 ensure that they have the skills necessary to engage with
200 participating foster youth.

201 (h) Provide assistance with the program's administrative
202 and procedural requirements to foster youth interested in
203 participating in the internship program, including, but not
204 limited to, identifying and monitoring internship opportunities
205 offered by approved agencies, being knowledgeable of the
206 training and skills needed to match eligible foster youth to
207 appropriate roles offered by approved agencies, and assisting
208 eligible foster youth with applying for employment positions in
209 which they meet the minimum required qualifications.

210 (i) Publicize specific opportunities for internship
211 positions offered by approved agencies in an easily accessible
212 manner and inform foster youth who may be eligible for the
213 program of where to locate such information.

214 (j) Assess each foster youth's career interests and
215 determine the most appropriate internship opportunities based on
216 his or her expressed interests.

217 (k) Ensure that internships under this section comply with
218 the Fair Labor Standards Act.

219 (l) By November 1, 2022, facilitate and work with the
220 Department of Education, the Board of Governors of the State
221 University System, the Independent Colleges and Universities of
222 Florida, the Commission for Independent Education, and approved
223 agencies to establish a system for secondary institutions to
224 award college credit toward a degree for internship positions
225 held by foster youth through the internship program.

226 (m) Conduct follow-up interviews with participating foster
227 youth within 3 months after their employment start date to
228 ensure participants transition successfully into the work
229 environment and to gather feedback on how to improve the
230 experience for future participants. Such data must be submitted
231 to the Florida Institute for Child Welfare by August 1, 2023,
232 and by August 1 annually thereafter for inclusion in the report
233 required under subsection (8).

234 (n) Gather and compile feedback from mentors assigned to
235 participating foster youth or from other personnel who are
236 employed by participating agencies on how to improve the
237 experience for both foster youth participants and the approved
238 agencies that participate in the program. Such data must be
239 submitted to the Florida Institute for Child Welfare by August
240 1, 2023, and by August 1 annually thereafter for inclusion in
241 the report required under subsection (8).

242 (o) Collaborate with the Florida Institute for Child
243 Welfare to provide any requested information necessary to
244 prepare each annual report required under subsection (8).

245 (5) PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS OF APPROVED AGENCIES.—Each
246 approved agency shall:

247 (a) Provide the department, or the community-based care
248 lead agencies or the lead agencies' subcontracted providers,
249 with a list, updated at least monthly, of open employment
250 opportunities for which an eligible foster youth may apply to

251 seek employment through the internship program.

252 (b) Offer priority consideration, including an interview,
253 to any eligible foster youth who applies for an open other-
254 personal-services position pursuant to this section, provided he
255 or she meets all the minimum qualifications for employment in
256 such position.

257 (c) Recruit employees within approved agencies to serve as
258 mentors for foster youth employed with such agencies through the
259 internship program.

260 1. To serve as a mentor, employees must:

261 a. Have worked for the approved agency for a minimum of 1
262 year;

263 b. Have experience relevant to the employment
264 responsibilities of the intern;

265 c. Complete a minimum of 1 hour of trauma-informed
266 training to gain skills critical for successfully engaging youth
267 who have been involved in the foster care system; and

268 d. Pass a level 2 background screening as provided in s.
269 435.04 if the employee will be assigned to a foster youth who is
270 younger than 18 years old and if the employee has not passed
271 such a screening within the previous 3 years or is not exempt
272 from such requirement pursuant to s. 435.07. An employee
273 required to pass a level 2 background screening pursuant to this
274 sub-subparagraph must submit a full set of his or her
275 fingerprints to his or her employing approved agency. The

276 approved agency shall forward the fingerprints to the Department
277 of Law Enforcement for state processing, and the Department of
278 Law Enforcement shall forward the fingerprints to the Federal
279 Bureau of Investigation for national processing. The department
280 shall pay the fees for state and federal fingerprint processing.
281 The fee per each name submitted for processing shall be set at
282 the same amount as prescribed in s. 943.053(3)(e); however, if
283 any exceptions in that paragraph for a reduced fee are
284 applicable, the department may pay the reduced fee under such
285 circumstances.

286 2. Employees who serve as mentors for a minimum of 6
287 consecutive months are eligible for a maximum payment of \$1,000
288 per intern per fiscal year, to be issued as follows:

289 a. At the conclusion of the first 6 consecutive months of
290 service, \$500.

291 b. At the conclusion of an additional 6 consecutive months
292 of service, \$500.

293 3. An employee may serve as a mentor for a maximum of
294 three interns at one time, but may not receive more than \$3,000
295 in compensation per fiscal year for serving as a mentor. Any
296 time spent serving as a mentor to an intern under this section
297 counts toward the required minimum service to be eligible for
298 payments pursuant to subparagraph 2.

299 (d) Engage an intern's assigned mentor and the approved
300 agency's internship program liaison and, if applicable, document

301 the intern's failure to comply with a corrective action plan
302 after being given a reasonable opportunity to do so before
303 discharging a foster youth employed pursuant to this section.

304 (e) Provide relevant feedback to the department at least
305 annually for the department to comply with paragraphs (4)(m) and
306 (n).

307 (f) Collaborate with the Florida Institute for Child
308 Welfare to provide any requested information necessary to
309 prepare each annual report required under subsection (8).

310 (6) TIME LIMITATIONS FOR PARTICIPATION.—A foster youth who
311 obtains employment with an approved agency may participate in
312 the internship program for no more than 1 year from his or her
313 start date of employment as an other-personal-services employee
314 with an approved agency pursuant to this section. A foster youth
315 may be employed as an intern under the internship program by
316 more than one approved agency, but may not be employed by more
317 than one approved agency at the same time. However, an approved
318 agency may extend the employment of a foster youth beyond the 1-
319 year internship program in his or her capacity as an other-
320 personal-services employee or may hire the foster youth as a
321 full-time employee, but the extension of employment or hiring of
322 a foster youth may not be as an intern pursuant to this section.

323 (7) CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT.—As conditions of employment
324 as an intern under the internship program, a foster youth shall
325 be subject to all of the following:

326 (a) A participant must meet the definition of foster youth
327 as defined in paragraph (3) (c) at the time such youth applies
328 for an internship position with an approved agency.

329 (b) A foster youth must complete the minimum training
330 requirements provided in paragraph (4) (f) related to
331 interviewing before an interview with an approved agency and
332 must complete all other training before commencement of work
333 within the approved agency. The department, or, if designated,
334 the community-based care lead agencies or the lead agencies'
335 subcontracted providers, may determine on a case-by-case basis
336 if an eligible foster youth needs to complete training before he
337 or she applies for an internship position.

338 (c) If offered employment as an intern, a foster youth
339 must be classified as an other-personal-services employee.
340 Foster youth who have accepted employment with an approved
341 agency pursuant to this section may be discharged after the
342 approved agency has engaged the intern's assigned mentor and the
343 approved agency's internship program staff to assist the intern
344 and has documented the intern's failure to comply with a
345 corrective action plan after being given a reasonable
346 opportunity to do so.

347 (d) A foster youth may work a maximum of 20 hours per
348 week.

349 (e) A foster youth shall spend all stipend funds received
350 for the specific purpose of purchasing business attire or

351 clothing that is in compliance with the dress code requirements
352 of the approved agency with which the foster youth is employed.
353 Notwithstanding any limitation on funds provided to purchase
354 clothing, foster youth shall comply with any dress code
355 requirements of the approved agency with which he or she is
356 employed.

357 (f) A foster youth shall be afforded the employee
358 protections of all relevant and applicable federal and state
359 laws, including compensation at minimum wage for any work
360 performed. Compensation earned pursuant to employment gained
361 through the internship program may not be considered earned
362 income for purposes of computing eligibility for federal or
363 state benefits, including, but not limited to, the Supplemental
364 Nutrition Assistance Program, a housing choice assistance
365 voucher program, the Temporary Cash Assistance Program, the
366 Medicaid program, or the school readiness program.

367 (g) A foster youth may, at the discretion of a
368 postsecondary institution within this state in which such youth
369 is enrolled, earn college credits toward a degree for work
370 performed as an intern under the internship program. College
371 credits earned for work performed under the internship program
372 may be in addition to any compensation earned for the same work
373 performed under the internship program and may be awarded for
374 completion of the whole or any part of the internship program.
375 An institution has the discretion to determine whether the

376 foster youth must comply with administrative requirements to be
377 eligible for college credit, but must treat such positions the
378 same as if a student obtained employment through a means other
379 than the internship program. Approved agencies shall cooperate
380 with postsecondary educational institutions to provide any
381 information about internship positions which is necessary to
382 enable the institutions to determine whether to grant the
383 participating foster youth credit toward his or her degree.

384 (8) REPORTS.—By October 1, 2023, and annually thereafter,
385 the Florida Institute for Child Welfare shall submit a report to
386 the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of
387 the House of Representatives which evaluates the internship
388 program, including, but not limited to, whether the program is
389 in compliance with this section; the outcomes of foster youth
390 who obtain employment through the internship program; a summary
391 of the feedback received pursuant to paragraphs (4) (m) and (n)
392 from participating foster youth and mentors from approved
393 agencies who have participated in the program; and
394 recommendations, if any, for actions necessary to improve the
395 effectiveness and outcomes of the program.

396 (9) RULEMAKING.—The department and approved agencies shall
397 adopt rules to implement this section.

398 Section 2. Subsection (5) is added to section 414.56,
399 Florida Statutes, to read:

400 414.56 Office of Continuing Care.—The department shall

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401 establish an Office of Continuing Care to ensure young adults
402 who age out of the foster care system between 18 and 21 years of
403 age, or 22 years of age with a documented disability, have a
404 point of contact until the young adult reaches the age of 26 in
405 order to receive ongoing support and care coordination needed to
406 achieve self-sufficiency. Duties of the office include, but are
407 not limited to:

408 (5) Establishing and operating an internship program for
409 foster youth and complying with the requirements of s.
410 409.1455(4).

411 Section 3. For the 2022-2023 fiscal year, the sums of
412 \$1,292,378 in recurring funds and \$350,376 in nonrecurring funds
413 are appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the Department
414 of Children and Families to implement this act.

415 Section 4. This act shall take effect July 1, 2022.