By Senator Albritton

A bill to be entitled
An act relating to the Step Into Success internship program; creating s. 409.1455, F.S.; providing a short title; establishing the Step Into Success internship program within the Department of Children and Families for eligible foster youth; requiring the program to include qualified designated personnel who are responsible for specified services; requiring that eligible foster youth receive priority consideration for certain internship positions; defining terms; requiring the department to establish an internship program by a specified date; requiring the department to designate and ensure sufficient qualified staff to implement and maintain the program; requiring the department to prepare written educational and training materials by a specified date and update the materials at least annually; requiring the department to provide training and written materials to designated personnel; requiring the department to provide certain written materials to foster youth; requiring lead agencies to ensure such materials are provided to subcontracted providers; requiring the department to advertise and promote the program; requiring the department to provide specified training to foster youth; requiring such training to be provided in addition to other specified training; authorizing the development of such training by or in collaboration with specified entities; providing construction; requiring the department to develop and provide
trauma-informed training to mentors; requiring the department to provide assistance with the program’s administrative and procedural requirements to interested foster youth; requiring the department to publicize internship opportunities and inform foster youth of where to locate the information; requiring the department to assess the career interests of foster youth; requiring the department to ensure internships comply with the Fair Labor Standards Act; requiring the department to collaborate with specified entities to establish a system by a specified date for secondary institutions to award college credits; requiring the department to conduct follow-up interviews with participating foster youth within a specified timeframe and for a specified purpose; requiring the department to submit data from such interviews by a specified date annually for inclusion in a specified report; requiring the department to gather and compile feedback from mentors assigned to participating foster youth or personnel from participating agencies for a specified purpose; requiring the department to submit compiled mentor feedback by a specified date annually for inclusion in a specified report; requiring the department to collaborate with the Florida Institute of Child Welfare in preparation of an annual report; requiring approved agencies to provide and monthly update a list of open employment opportunities for which eligible foster youth may apply; requiring approved agencies to
offer foster youth priority consideration under certain circumstances; requiring approved agencies to recruit mentors to work with participating foster youth employed through the program; providing requirements for such mentors; specifying payment procedures and requirements for mentors; requiring approved agencies to implement certain procedures before discharging foster youth; requiring approved agencies to provide feedback and collaborate in preparation of a specified report; limiting the timeframe for foster youth participation in the internship program; authorizing the continued employment of foster youth under certain conditions; specifying conditions of employment for foster youth as interns; requiring a foster youth to meet eligibility requirements at the time of applying for an internship position; requiring foster youth to complete specified training within certain timeframes; authorizing the department or designated lead agencies or subcontracted providers to determine if an interested foster youth needs to complete training before applying; requiring that foster youth be classified as other-personal-services employees; specifying prerequisite conditions for discharging a foster youth intern; limiting the number of hours per week a foster youth may work; requiring foster youth to spend certain stipend funds for specific purposes and comply with certain dress code requirements; applying employment protections to foster youth.
employed through the internship program; excluding compensation earned under the internship program from the definition of earned income for calculating economic self-sufficiency benefits; specifying requirements and conditions for foster youth to earn college credit for work performed in the internship program; granting postsecondary educational institutions with discretion to determine administrative compliance requirements; requiring approved agencies to cooperate with postsecondary educational institutions to provide specified information; requiring the Florida Institute for Child Welfare to submit an annual report to the Governor and the Legislature within a certain timeframe; providing requirements for the report; requiring the department and approved agencies to adopt rules; amending s. 414.56, F.S.; revising the duties of the Office of Continuing Care to include establishing and operating an internship program; providing appropriations; providing an effective date.

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

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

409.1455 Internship program for foster youth.—

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

(2) CREATION.—There is established the Step Into Success
internship program to be administered by the department for eligible foster youth to develop essential workforce and professional skills in furtherance of their careers, to transition from the custody of the department to independent living, and to become best prepared for an independent and successful future. The establishment of this program must include qualified designated personnel whose responsibilities are to provide the required services to approved agency liaison personnel and eligible foster youth in accordance with this section. An eligible foster youth must receive priority consideration for any internship positions as provided under this section.

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

(a) “Approved agency” means one of the following agencies that may participate in the internship program by employing eligible foster youth:

1. The Department of Children and Families;
2. The Department of Health;
3. The Agency for Health Care Administration;
4. The Department of Education;
5. The Department of Environmental Protection;
6. The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission; and
7. The Office of the State Fire Marshal within the Department of Financial Services.

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

(c) “Foster youth” means an individual older than 16 years of age but younger than 26 years of age who is currently or was previously placed in foster care within this state.
(d) “Priority consideration” means the approved agency must invite a foster youth who is eligible to participate in the internship program to be interviewed for any position for which he or she meets the minimum qualifications.

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

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

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

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

(d) Provide written materials to foster youth to ensure that all such youth are informed of the requirements for participating in the program and the contact information for the program office. All community-based care lead agencies shall ensure that any subcontracted providers that directly serve
youth are also provided with the training and written materials.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(a) Provide the department, or the community-based care
lead agencies or the lead agencies’ subcontracted providers,
with a list, updated at least monthly, of open employment
opportunities for which an eligible foster youth may apply to
seek employment through the internship program.

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

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

1. To serve as a mentor, employees must:

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

b. Have experience relevant to the employment
responsibilities of the intern;
c. Complete a minimum of 1 hour of trauma-informed training to gain skills critical for successfully engaging youth who have been involved in the foster care system; and

d. Pass a level 2 background screening as provided in s. 435.04 if the employee will be assigned to a foster youth who is younger than 18 years old and if the employee has not passed such a screening within the previous 3 years or is not exempt from such requirement pursuant to s. 435.07. An employee required to pass a level 2 background screening pursuant to this sub-subparagraph must submit a full set of his or her fingerprints to his or her employing approved agency. The approved agency shall forward the fingerprints to the Department of Law Enforcement for state processing, and the Department of Law Enforcement shall forward the fingerprints to the Federal Bureau of Investigation for national processing. The department shall pay the fees for state and federal fingerprint processing. The fee per each name submitted for processing shall be set at the same amount as prescribed in s. 943.053(3)(e); however, if any exceptions in that paragraph for a reduced fee are applicable, the department may pay the reduced fee under such circumstances.

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

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

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

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

(d) Engage an intern’s assigned mentor and the approved agency’s internship program liaison and, if applicable, document the intern’s failure to comply with a corrective action plan after being given a reasonable opportunity to do so before discharging a foster youth employed pursuant to this section.

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

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

(6) TIME LIMITATIONS FOR PARTICIPATION.—A foster youth who obtains employment with an approved agency may participate in the internship program for no more than 1 year from his or her start date of employment as an other-personal-services employee with an approved agency pursuant to this section. A foster youth may be employed as an intern under the internship program by more than one approved agency, but may not be employed by more than one approved agency at the same time. However, an approved agency may extend the employment of a foster youth beyond the 1-year internship program in his or her capacity as an other-personal-services employee or may hire the foster youth as a full-time employee, but the extension of employment or hiring of a foster youth may not be as an intern pursuant to this section.
(7) CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT.—As conditions of employment as an intern under the internship program, a foster youth shall be subject to all of the following:

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

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

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

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

(e) A foster youth shall spend all stipend funds received for the specific purpose of purchasing business attire or clothing that is in compliance with the dress code requirements of the approved agency with which the foster youth is employed. Notwithstanding any limitation on funds provided to purchase
clothing, foster youth shall comply with any dress code requirements of the approved agency with which he or she is employed.

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

(g) A foster youth may, at the discretion of a postsecondary institution within this state in which such youth is enrolled, earn college credits toward a degree for work performed as an intern under the internship program. College credits earned for work performed under the internship program may be in addition to any compensation earned for the same work performed under the internship program and may be awarded for completion of the whole or any part of the internship program. An institution has the discretion to determine whether the foster youth must comply with administrative requirements to be eligible for college credit, but must treat such positions the same as if a student obtained employment through a means other than the internship program. Approved agencies shall cooperate with postsecondary educational institutions to provide any information about internship positions which is necessary to enable the institutions to determine whether to grant the
participating foster youth credit toward his or her degree.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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