



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

Office of the Commissioner

James Hunter Williams
Commissioner

December 30, 2024

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable Glenn Youngkin
Governor of Virginia

The Honorable L. Louise Lucas
Chair, Senate Finance & Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Luke E. Torian
Chair, House Appropriations Committee

FROM: James H. Williams *James Williams*

SUBJECT: Annual Report on Statewide Driver's License Program for Youth in Foster Care

The attached report is submitted pursuant to Item 329.V. of the 2024 Appropriation Act. Out of this appropriation, \$310,000 the first year and \$310,00 the second year from the general fund is to be used develop and implement a statewide driver's licensing program for youth in foster care. The agency must report on the number of foster care youth supported by the program and any recommendations to improve the program to the Chairs of House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Appropriations committees annually on December 1.

Please contact me if you have questions.

JW:kc
Attachment

cc: The Honorable Janet V. Kelly, Secretary of Health and Human Services



Driver's Licensing Program for Youth in Foster Care

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DRIVER'S LICENSING PROGRAM FOR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

A Report for the Virginia General Assembly

December 01, 2024

REPORT MANDATE

[2024 Appropriation Act, Section 329 V:](#)

Out of this appropriation, \$310,000 the first year and \$310,000 the second year from the general fund shall be provided to support the development and implementation of a statewide driver's licensing program to support foster care youth in obtaining a driver's license. Funding shall be made available to local departments of social services to reimburse foster care providers for increases to their existing motor vehicle insurance premiums that occur because a foster care youth in their care has been added to their insurance policy. The program may also reimburse foster care providers for additional coverage that provides liability protection should a foster care youth get into or cause a catastrophic accident. Additionally, funding shall be made available to foster care youth in Virginia's Fostering Futures Program to assist in covering the cost of obtaining motor vehicle insurance. The Department shall develop reimbursement policies for foster care providers and foster care youth. The Department shall coordinate and administer the driver's licensing program based on best practices from similar programs in other states, to include developing educational or training materials that educate foster parents, private providers, and foster youth about (i) liability issues, insurance laws, and common insurance practices (to include laws about renewal and cancellation, how long an accident can affect premiums, how to establish that a foster youth is no longer living in the residence, and other applicable topics); (ii) DMV requirements to obtain a learner's permit and driver's license; (iii) what funding and resources are available to assist in this process, to include, paying school lab fees for "Behind the Wheel" or paying a private driving education company; and (iv) why getting a driver's license on time is important for normalcy and a successful transition to adulthood. The Department shall provide information on how many foster care youth were supported by this program and any recommendations to improve the program to the Chairs of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Appropriations Committees annually on December 1.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth in foster care face many barriers to obtaining a driver's license which is important for normalcy and a successful transition to adulthood. Without a driver's license, individuals from foster care are limited in employment, education and housing opportunities.

The Virginia Department of Social Services will utilize appropriated funds to develop and implement a statewide driver's licensing program for foster youth to obtain a driver's license and access car insurance. The program will support foster care youth with obtaining a driver's license, car insurance and other related costs. The program will educate youth, foster parents, and private providers on liability issues, insurance law, and common insurance practices. It will also provide education on Department of Motor Vehicle (DMV) requirements to obtain a learner's permit and driver's license, funding options and resources

About VDSS and Foster Care

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) partners with local departments of social services and community organizations, to promote the well-being of children and families across the Commonwealth. We proudly serve alongside nearly 13,000 state and local human services professionals throughout the Social Services System, who ensure that thousands of Virginia's most vulnerable citizens have access to the best services and benefits available to them.

Together, we work each day to serve, empower, and create opportunities for brighter futures.

Youth in foster care face many barriers to obtaining a driver's license which is important for normalcy and a successful transition to adulthood. Without a driver's license, individuals from foster care are limited in employment, education and housing opportunities. VDSS is developing a statewide program to support youth in foster care with obtaining a driver's license, and car insurance.

to assist in getting a driver's license, and the importance of getting a driver's license for successful transition to adulthood.

DEFINITIONS

The Chafee Program

The Chafee Program is a component of the VDSS Foster Care program and the Fostering Futures program which supports foster care youth from age 14 to age 23. The program provides critical resources to support youth in age appropriate, normative activities while in foster care and as they transition out of care. This program empowers youth by offering resources and supports to meet the youth's individual needs for success, such as:

1. Helping youth attain a high school diploma and post-secondary education or vocational training.
2. Training and opportunities to practice daily living skills such as financial literacy and driving instruction.
3. Achieving meaningful, permanent connections with caring adults.
4. Engaging in age and developmentally appropriate activities which promote positive youth development.
5. Experiential learning that reflects what their peers in intact families' experience.

Fostering Futures

Fostering Futures is Virginia's extended foster care program, which is a voluntary agreement between LDSS and foster care youth to meet and maintain specific criteria between the ages of 18 and 21. The program provides the much-needed support and assistance for youth who turn 18 while in foster care, as they transition into adulthood. By providing maintenance payments and foster care services to participants, the program provides a safety net for young people and a safer transition to independence that reduces the risk of youth and young adults becoming homeless and victims of human trafficking.

Independent Living Services

Independent Living (IL) Services include a broad range of activities, education, training, and services that are age and developmentally appropriate for youth ages 14 to 23.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Youth in foster care face many barriers to obtaining a driver's license which is important for normalcy and a successful transition to adulthood. Without a driver's license, individuals from foster care are limited in employment, education, and housing opportunities. VDSS has been allocated funding to develop and implement a statewide driver's licensing program for foster youth to obtain a driver's license and access car insurance.

CONTACTS

Author

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Statewide Driver's Licensing Program for Youth in Foster Care

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND

Historically, youth in foster care face significant barriers to obtaining a driver's license. In 2018, the Commission on Youth reported that less than five percent of this population in Virginia obtain their driver's license by their 18th birthday¹. This fact demonstrates how youth in foster care miss out on typical milestone opportunities compared to those youth not in foster care. Obtaining a driver's license is important for normalcy and a successful transition to adulthood. Without a driver's license, individuals in foster care are limited in employment, education and housing opportunities.

VDSS identified a need for a statewide driver's licensing program that would alleviate the barriers for eligible youth to receive their driver's license, access car insurance, and provide support for these youth to meet their individualized driving needs and help them achieve an important milestone towards normalcy and self-sufficiency. Foster youth have been reaching out to VDSS with their concerns over challenges to obtaining their driver's licenses. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 provided additional funding to states to assist in overcoming these barriers and challenges. This created a crucial and necessary opportunity for driving and transportation assistance and support for foster care youth. Using the Chafee COVID-19 funds, VDSS implemented a six-month pilot program, the Transportation Assistance Program (TAP), to serve foster care youth between the ages of 15 ½ and 23 years old to help them obtain their learner's permit, driver's license, driving education, and a vehicle with the goal of creating opportunities and an intentional process for independence, normalcy and achieving a lifelong skill.

Additionally, the Children's Bureau, in partnership with Embrace Families and Treehouse, collaborated to create Paving the Way, which offers expertise to states and territorial child welfare agencies on creating a driver's license program for youth in foster care. Virginia applied and was approved to receive targeted technical assistance. Paving the Way provided VDSS direct, individualized services including recommendations related to outreach, marketing, financial administration, and program planning.

¹ <https://vcoy.virginia.gov/Final%20Report%20Foster%20Youth%20Driver's%20Licenses.pdf>

BARRIERS

The primary goal for VDSS partnering with Paving the Way was to develop and strengthen strategies that would remove barriers to youth obtaining learner's permits and driver's licenses. Paving the Way met with members of SPEAKOUT, Virginia's Youth Advisory Board, and VDSS provided the Paving the Way team with a report from a focus group of youth attending a statewide youth conference, as well as data from a survey administered to LDSS on barriers and challenges of obtaining a learner's permit and driver's license.

Feedback from youth during the SPEAKOUT meeting, the focus group, and LDSS was similar and identified multiple barriers and challenges including:

- the cost of car insurance
- lack of DMV cooperation
- lack of information regarding how to acquire a driver's license
- cost and availability of behind the wheel programs
- inability of youth in foster care to get into/attend the classroom portion of driver education programs
- cost of private driving classes
- lack of driver's education classes offered in public schools
- difficulty meeting the 40-hour practice driving requirement
- lack of opportunity for youth in residential placements/group homes
- little to no access to a vehicle to use
- youth not able to focus on their driver's license due to academic difficulties
- placement changes (geographically)
- not enough information on resources and funds

As a result, Paving the Way compiled a detailed report for Virginia providing recommendations on topics such as developing partners, increasing awareness for the need of a driver's license, marketing and outreach, vehicle access, car purchase, car insurance, program oversight and execution, and data collection. VDSS plans to utilize the recommendations and the funds from the statewide driver's licensing program to develop and implement a program that supports and empowers youth to drive. It is important to note, many of the barriers identified by the workgroup and recommendations provided by Paving the Way aligned with the 2018 Commission on Youth Report.

SECTION 2: FY2023 AND FY2024 ACTIVITIES

VDSS offers support for youth in foster care and formerly in foster care up to age 23 to obtain driver's licenses and other transportation needs through federal Chafee funds allocated to LDSS; however, Virginia's Chafee allocation is limited and not sufficient to meet the needs of all eligible youth. Additional funding sources are needed to support this special population with obtaining their licenses and accessing car insurance.

In anticipation of the Virginia General Assembly providing the funds for a statewide program, VDSS took the first steps in developing a program. First, VDSS developed the Virginia Driving Assistance Program (VDAP) Workgroup in April 2023. The members of this workgroup were a diverse group of subject matter experts from VDSS, LDSS, foster parents and youth with lived foster care experience, nonprofits, IL organizations and the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV).

The VDAP objectives were to identify barriers related to drivers' education and vehicle needs, create solutions, collaborate, generate new partnerships and ultimately create a statewide driver's assistance, education and support program to support youth in their driving and transportation journeys. The members of the VDAP workgroup offered great insight and support into creating this system and addressing current barriers.

To tackle specific recommendations gathered in the Paving the Way report, three sub-workgroups within VDAP were created. *Sub-workgroup One* focused on DMV Barriers/Solutions, Driving Hours, and Driver's Education. This included documentation requirements, proof of residency, the optional court licensing ceremony, understanding the regulations around driving hours and driver's education and the accessibility of driving hours and education courses. *Sub-workgroup Two* focused on car insurance, payment of car insurance, identifying insurance companies willing to insure a young driver on their policy, assisting minors in obtaining their own insurance and foster parent education. Lastly, *Sub-workgroup Three* was dedicated to caregiver support of youth driving and additional supports for caregivers (i.e., foster parents, kinship parents, program staff). This included objectives of increasing the comfort level of caregivers and providing education around youth driving, payments for caregivers who add a youth to their insurance and covering the costs of incidents. Since the VDAP Workgroup addressed many of the barriers, the group ended in July 2024.

Second, VDSS requested and was awarded \$270,000 additional COVID Chafee funding in October 2023 from the federal government and used these funds to support the driving and transportation needs of Chafee eligible youth ages 15 up to 23. VDSS developed and implemented another pilot program, entitled Transportation Assistance Pilot Program (TAPP). These additional Chafee funds were used to alleviate as many barriers as possible to ensure youth receive the services and support necessary to meet their individualized driving and transportation needs. The costs could be related to:

- learner's permit
- driver's license
- auto insurance for the youth or to reimburse a foster parent who has added the youth to their policy
- driver's education classes and testing fees, practice lessons, practice hours, license fees
- basic car repairs and maintenance
- purchasing an automobile

VDSS estimated that 19 percent of youth that qualified were able to use these funds to take driver's education, purchase vehicles, cover auto insurance premiums, make vehicle repairs to keep their vehicles on the road and many other expenses. Of Virginia's 120 LDSS a little more than half (67) used these funds to support youth with their goals to get in the driver's seat. It is important to note only 39 agencies received additional funds to cover these transactions for the youth and nine LDSS did not have youth over the age of 16 in their custody. There were a few agencies that did not to participate in the pilot program as they did not have capacity to do so.

Of all the TAPP purchases, most of the funds were spent on youth participating in Fostering Futures (63 percent of funds); however, there were approximately 827 individuals in Fostering Futures and only about 20 percent of them were able to access funding to support their transportation needs to get to and from work and school. Although Virginia has always allowed LDSS to use Chafee funds for driving and transportation needs, the additional Chafee funds allowed more youth to be served. According to the data, the budgeted \$270,000 that was received by VDSS in October 2023 was allocated by mid-January 2024 to LDSS, which illustrates the demand for such funds to support these youth.

SECTION 3: IMPLEMENTATION

The Virginia statewide driver's licensing program for foster youth was named Drive to Thrive by SPEAKOUT and the Virginia Youth Advisory Board. The VDSS plans to develop and implement the program in two phases to ensure the LDSS receive the Drive to Thrive funds for youth as soon as possible and VDSS incorporates all the requirements and components outlined in the Appropriations Act for this program.

PHASE 1 (FY2025)

VDSS is building the infrastructure for the new program, which includes partnering with VDSS Finance to establish a budget line, cost code, and create a finance manual guide. The budget line and cost code will support the cost of training, supplies, and other expenditures related to the development and implementation of the statewide driver's licensing program. In addition, the funds will support the reimbursement of LDSS expenditures for foster youth by covering various costs associated with obtaining a driver's license and car insurance.

VDSS will hire a contract worker to administer the program at this time, which will allow VDSS to distribute the funds quickly to LDSS. The funds will be distributed through LASER (Locality Automated System Expenditure Reimbursement) System, which generates and reimburses funds to local agencies for incurred expenditures. Each LDSS will need to establish the new budget line for their agency. LDSS will submit a Drive to Thrive Funds Request Form (created by VDSS) for each youth once the cost code and budget line are established and funds are available. This form will allow VDSS to track data on each youth who receives funds and expenditures.

VDSS is developing a guidebook for LDSS to describe the new Drive to Thrive program, eligibility requirements and funding sources, a list of driving schools statewide, and how to access the Drive to Thrive funds. Also, VDSS will advertise the new program through various platforms (i.e., broadcast, infographics, presentations, website). VDSS realizes that having one person to administer the program limits capacity in offering the education and training components and other services statewide. VDSS is actively working to begin the new Drive to Thrive program by November 1, 2024.

PHASE 2 (FY2026)

As recommended by Paving the Way, VDSS plans to procure a vendor to administer the driver's licensing program statewide based on best practices from similar programs in other states. VDSS will work with VDSS Procurement on the Request for Proposal (RFP) process to offer a statewide driver's licensing program to begin July 1, 2025. The RFP process typically takes 7-9 months.

A vendor is needed to provide all eligible youth in foster care access to driver's education, support, direction, and guidance to navigate the processes and alleviate barriers in obtaining learner's permit, driver's license, drivers education, behind the wheel driving hours and auto insurance. All individuals over 16 years old should be actively involved in the steps to obtaining their driver's license before they transition out of foster care. The vendor will also provide funds to support youth in Fostering Futures in obtaining driver's education, adequate auto insurance and covering other license related expenses.

Once a vendor is identified and awarded the contract, the funds will not only cover administrative costs, but the vendor will be responsible for developing education and training materials that will be used across the state and on VDSS internal/external media platforms, to educate foster parents, private providers, LDSS workers, and youth in foster care across Virginia about:

1. Auto insurance laws and common insurance practices
2. Driving liability issues and concerns
3. DMV requirements to obtain a learner's permit and driver's license.
4. Available funding and resources
5. The importance of getting a driver's license on time for normalcy and a successful transition to adulthood
6. Defensive driving courses/techniques
7. Car maintenance and learning the basics of how a car works

Additionally, the contractor will have flexible payment options to ensure qualified expenses are easily covered without relying on the youth, foster families or community providers to pay out of pocket first. A barrier was identified during the Pilot Program in which the LDSS struggled to pay for car insurance on behalf of the youth due to their finance policies. Policies that required proof of payment resulted in youth, who were unable to afford the upfront cost, driving illegally. Some LDSS did not have a credit card to pay with and could only cut a check to a vendor. Sometimes it could take a month for the check to be received. Other LDSS have an agency credit card but are unable to make payments over the phone or online with it and in cases where the youth was not local to the agency, the youth had to wait until the worker from the appropriate locality came to visit which would lead to unnecessary delays. Having a vendor to implement the program will alleviate many barriers faced by the youth and LDSS to get expenditures paid.

Since VDSS is in the process of developing the program, there are no recommendations currently.

APPENDIX A: 2024 APPROPRIATION ACT, SECTION 329 V

2024 Appropriation Act, Section 329 V:

Out of this appropriation, \$310,000 the first year and \$310,000 the second year from the general fund shall be provided to support the development and implementation of a statewide driver's licensing program to support foster care youth in obtaining a driver's license. Funding shall be made available to local departments of social services to reimburse foster care providers for increases to their existing motor vehicle insurance premiums that occur because a foster care youth in their care has been added to their insurance policy. The program may also reimburse foster care providers for additional coverage that provides liability protection should a foster care youth get into or cause a catastrophic accident. Additionally, funding shall be made available to foster care youth in Virginia's Fostering Futures Program to assist in covering the cost of obtaining motor vehicle insurance. The Department shall develop reimbursement policies for foster care providers and foster care youth. The Department shall coordinate and administer the driver's licensing program based on best practices from similar programs in other states, to include developing educational or training materials that educate foster parents, private providers, and foster youth about (i) liability issues, insurance laws, and common insurance practices (to include laws about renewal and cancellation, how long an accident can affect premiums, how to establish that a foster youth is no longer living in the residence, and other applicable topics); (ii) DMV requirements to obtain a learner's permit and driver's license; (iii) what funding and resources are available to assist in this process, to include, paying school lab fees for "Behind the Wheel" or paying a private driving education company; and (iv) why getting a driver's license on time is important for normalcy and a successful transition to adulthood. The Department shall provide information on how many foster care youth were supported by this program and any recommendations to improve the program to the Chairs of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Appropriations Committees annually on December 1.