



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
Office of the Commissioner

Kevin Erskine
Commissioner

November 26, 2025

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: Kevin Erskine 

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 2025 Appropriation Act, which provides:

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.

Please contact me if you have questions.

KE: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 to the Virginia General Assembly

December 01, 2025

REPORT MANDATE

Item 329.V. of the 2025 Appropriation Act

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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. To address the barriers, the 2024 Appropriations Act provides \$310,000 annually to VDSS to implement a statewide driver's license program known as the "Drive to Thrive" Program, a statewide initiative supporting youth in obtaining a driver's license and car insurance. During state fiscal year (SFY) 2025, VDSS focused on the infrastructure and hired a contract worker to administer the Program. The Program served a total of 170 youths. The Program's dedicated funding source enabled consistent and equitable service delivery.

During SFY 2026, VDSS initiated the Request for Proposals to procure a qualified vendor to administer the driver's licensing program. VDSS is recommending this approach to improve outreach to raise awareness, develop education and training materials, and ensure consistent implementation.

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. Young people with experience in foster care have tremendous potential, but lack of access to a driver's license can make it harder for them to pursue employment, education, and stable housing. VDSS is developing a statewide program to support youth in foster care with obtaining a driver's license and car insurance.

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 ages 14 to 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. Offering 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, a voluntary agreement between a local department of social services (LDSS) and foster care youth to meet and maintain specific criteria between the ages of 18 and 21. The program provides 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 unhoused and/or 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. Young people with experience in foster care have tremendous potential, but lack of access to a driver's license can make it harder for them to pursue employment, education, and stable housing. VDSS has been allocated funding to develop and implement a statewide driver's licensing program for foster youth to more readily 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. Young people with experience in foster care have tremendous potential, but lack of access to a driver's license can make it harder for them to pursue employment, education, and stable housing.

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 reached out to VDSS with their concerns over challenges towards 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 funding 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 achievement of a life 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 focused 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 were similar and identified multiple barriers and challenges including:

- 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 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
- Academic difficulties that create challenges to focus on obtaining a driver's license
- Placement changes (geographic)
- Limited 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 that 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: SFY 2025 ACTIVITIES AND IMPLEMENTATION

VDSS implemented the Program in two phases. During Phase One, VDSS developed and implemented the Program. For Phase Two, VDSS is pursuing a qualified vendor to implement the Program statewide due to limitations administrating the Program in house.

PHASE 1 SFY 2025

Phase One (SFY 25) – VDSS built the infrastructure for the Program, which included establishing a budget line and cost code, creating a finance manual for the state and LDSS and a Drive to Thrive Funds Request Form to be utilized by the LDSS for each youth. This form allowed VDSS to track data on expenditures for each youth that accessed the funds. In addition, VDSS developed a guidebook for LDSS that describes the Program’s eligibility requirements and how to access the funding. VDSS advertised the program through various platforms (i.e., broadcast, infographics, presentations, and a public website).

The budget line and cost code supported hiring a contract worker and the cost of expenditures related to the development and implementation of the statewide driver’s licensing program. The funds also supported the reimbursement of LDSS expenditures for youth in foster care and participating in Fostering Futures by covering various costs associated with obtaining a driver’s license and car insurance. Each LDSS also had to establish a new budget line to access the funds.

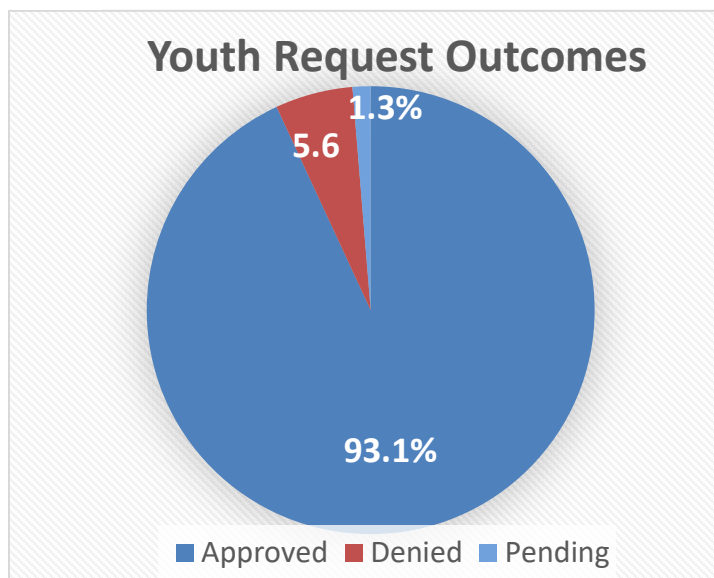
VDSS distributed the funds to LDSS through VDSS’ LASER System (Locality Automated System Expenditure Reimbursement), which generates and reimburses funds to LDSS for incurred expenditures. VDSS officially launched the Program on November 1, 2024.

PROGRAM DATA

The Program received a total of 232 requests from 54 LDSS between November 1, 2024 – August 31, 2025, serving a total of 170 individual youth. Below is a breakdown of requests approved, denied, and pending for these youth (Table 1):

- Approved: 216 (93.1%)
- Pending: 3 (1.3%)
- Denied: 13 (5.6%)

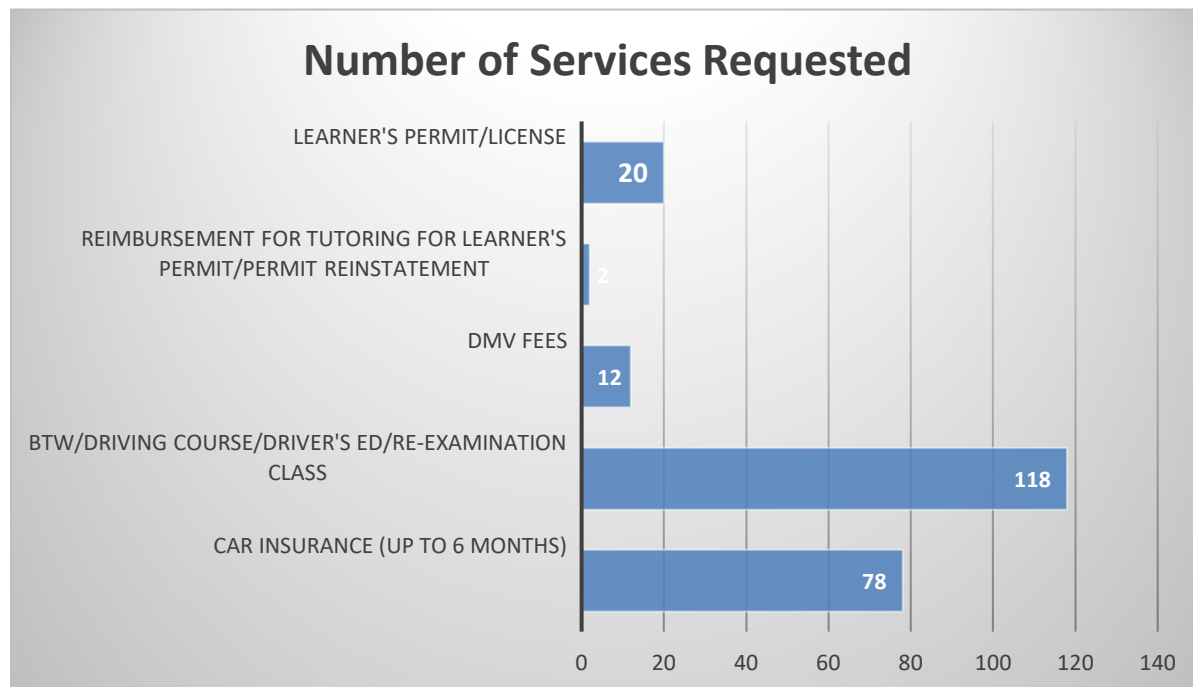
Table 1



The categories of services requested for youth included (Table 2):

- Driving Course / Driver's Ed / Behind-the-Wheel (BTW): 118
- Car Insurance: 78
- Learner's Permit / License: 20
- Department of Motor Vehicle (DMV) Fees: 12
- Tutoring / Reinstatement Fee: 2

Table 2

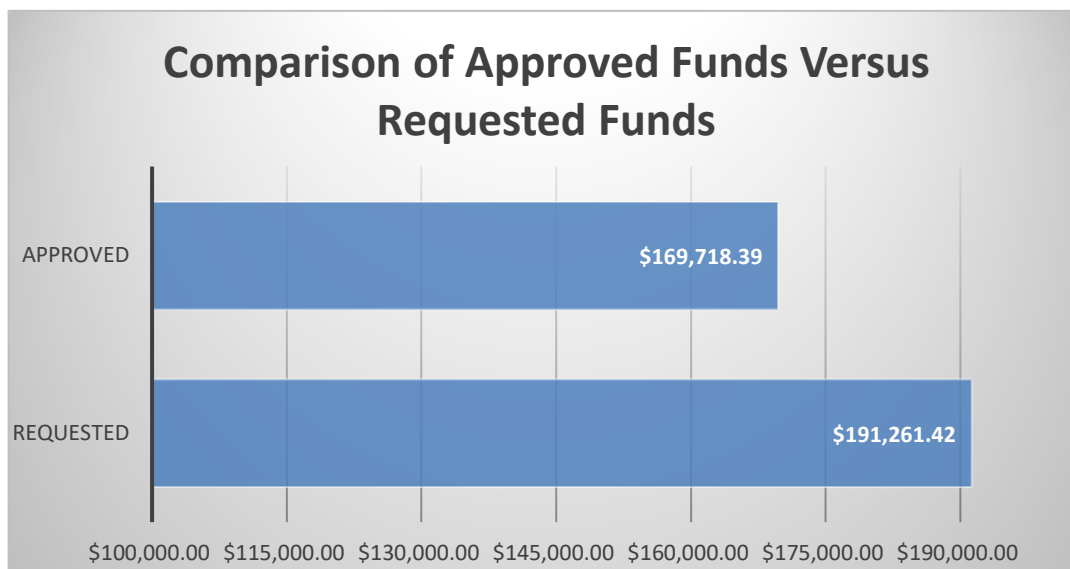


Some requests were denied as they did not meet the criteria:

- Car Repairs (2)
- Vehicle Purchase (1)
- Replace Certificate of Citizenship (1)
- Youth aged out of Fostering Futures (1)
- Failure of LDSS to update Life Skills Assessment and/or Transitional Living Plan in OASIS even after several email reminders (3)
- Drive To Thrive Request form missing necessary information and LDSS did not respond to follow up email (1)

As outlined in the Appropriation's Act, the Program's funding does not cover vehicle purchases or repairs. LDSS are required to have a current life skills assessment and transition plan for each youth prior to accessing funding. For ineligible requests, workers were encouraged to seek Chafee funds or other funding sources for their requests.

During Phase One, a total of \$191,261.42 was requested from the Program; however, the estimated amount approved was \$169,718.39 due to ineligible funding requests (Table 3). Approximately 54.74% of the total \$310,000 allocated to the Program was approved for direct services to youth, even though the Program did not start until November 1, 2024. The funding for the contract position is also paid out of the allocation.



Overall, the Program demonstrated a positive impact across Virginia in the first year of implementation with 93.1% of youth requests approved and 88.7% of requested funds granted. These figures reflect the Program’s responsiveness to youth needs. A key strength of the Program is the array of services offered, which includes: support for car insurance, Department of Motor Vehicle fees, driver’s education, and behind-the-wheel driving courses. This approach ensures that youth are not only prepared to drive but also equipped with the necessary resources to do so safely and legally. Also, the Program’s dedicated funding source enabled consistent and equitable service delivery.

Despite its successes, the Program faces challenges that hinder its full potential. One significant issue was limited awareness about the Program among LDSS, foster parents and youth. Another challenge was the difficulty some LDSS experience in utilizing their allocated funds or paying for services for young people in a timely manner. There is a need for improved communication, training, and administrative support to ensure that all available resources are fully leveraged for eligible youth.

PHASE 2 SFY 2026

Phase Two (SFY 2026) – Realizing that there are significant limitations in having one staff administering the Program statewide, VDSS has initiated the Request for Proposal (RFP) process to procure a qualified vendor to administer the driver’s licensing program based on best practices from similar programs in other states. The total amount of this contract will be \$310,000. The RFP process typically takes seven to eight months.

Once a vendor is identified and awarded the contract, the funds will cover administrative costs, and the vendor will be responsible for promoting awareness of the Program. Additionally, the vendor will develop education and training materials to educate foster parents, private providers, LDSS workers, and youth 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. Availability of funding and resources to assist in the driving process
5. The importance of getting a driver's license on time for normalcy and a successful transition to adulthood
6. Defensive driving course/techniques

In addition, the vendor can offer flexible payment options to ensure qualified expenses are easily covered without relying on the youth, LDSS, foster families or community providers to pay out of pocket first. During Phase One, VDSS identified a major barrier where several LDSS struggled to pay for car insurance on behalf of the youth due to their finance policies. Some LDSS did not have a credit card to pay and could only cut a check to a vendor, sometimes it could take a month for the check to be received. Others had an agency credit card but were unable to make payments over the phone or online with it and in cases where the youth was not local to them, the youth had to wait until the worker came to visit which led to unnecessary delays.

As the Program continues to grow and serve more youth, it is crucial that there are no delays in service delivery, administrative processing, or coordination for the LDSS. Having a vendor to implement the program will alleviate many barriers faced by the youth and LDSS to get access to the services, funding, and expenditures paid.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES

In its first year, VDSS identified key opportunities to strengthen the Program. Priorities include improving outreach to raise awareness, expanding training materials on topics like liability and insurance, and ensuring consistent implementation. Structured feedback tools such as surveys and focus groups can guide data-informed improvements. Tracking outcomes such as driver's education completion and license attainment will help measure impact and support ongoing refinement. Looking ahead, VDSS realizes the program must remain vigilant against several external threats that could impact its sustainability. Any reduction in funding could limit the availability of services to youth and reduce the Program's reach.

APPENDIX A REPORT MANDATE

ITEM 329.V. OF THE 2025 APPROPRIATION ACT

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