



STRENGTHENING THE VOICES
OF CASA STATEWIDE

HB 2286/SB 2054: REDUCING BARRIERS TO OBTAINING A DRIVER'S LICENSE: CREATING A PATHWAY TO SUCCESS FOR VULNERABLE YOUTH

BACKGROUND

Texas CASA, the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), the Department of Public Safety (DPS), Texas Appleseed, Texas Network of Youth Services and many other stakeholder groups identified the inability of youth in foster care to obtain Texas Driver's Licenses as an issue that severely impacts their ability to successfully transition from foster care into adulthood. Youth experiencing homelessness face these same barriers. Many youth who are homeless were previously in foster care and find they are in a McKinney-Vento defined living situation within a few short months of leaving care.

Research conducted by Casey Family Programs and others, both in Texas and nationally, has found that youth previously in foster care **“had better outcomes if they had a driver's license upon leaving care...”**¹, but that they face significant barriers to obtaining a driver's license in Texas. Driver's licenses are a necessity for personal transportation, especially in rural areas of the state where public transportation options are extremely limited. In addition, driver's licenses and IDs are integral to securing a job, school enrollment, obtaining voter registration and other legal documents, and reliably accessing safe housing and healthcare.

BUILDING ON SUCCESS FROM THE 86TH SESSION

House Bill 123 in the 86th Legislative Session created a fund to pay for costs associated with obtaining drivers licenses and state identification for youth in foster care and youth and young adults experiencing homelessness. The people of Texas have been incredibly generous and have donated a significant amount of money to support these populations in securing an ID and driver's license. Therefore, this session, advocates are seeking to expand the use of this fund to further address barriers that these young people experience when trying to obtain a driver's license. Specifically, young people need additional support in paying the costs associated with driver's education, access to a vehicle to practice driving or taking the driving test, and paying the cost associated with the driving test.

¹ White, O'Brien, Pecora, et al, (November 2012). *Texas Foster Care Alumni Study Technical Report: Outcomes at Ages 23 and 24*. Casey Family Programs.



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BARRIERS TO ACCESSING DRIVERS' EDUCATION AND TESTS

Some young people, whether current or former foster youth, or youth who have experienced homelessness, may not qualify for a Texas driver's license; and some already have a license or use other means to get driver's education and take the driving test. However, many young adults do not have anyone who can pay the fee for driver's education, which can range from between \$450-\$650. Others do not have access to a vehicle or know anyone with a valid license and insurance to help them practice driving, so they need access to driving schools for the required practice time (between 14 and 46 hours). Finally, for older youth, the only barrier may be access to a car to drive during their driver's test; driving schools can provide both the car and the test. So while the current fund helps offset the cost of the driver's license fee, many youth and young adults in foster care and/or experiencing homelessness cannot complete the requirements to obtain a driver's license, so they cannot take advantage of this benefit.

THE BILL

This legislation would require the Comptroller's Office to maintain 3x the amount spent in the previous fiscal year in the fund to continue to waive the fees for IDs and driver's licenses for current or former foster youth, or youth who have experienced homelessness. It would direct the Comptroller to allocate the rest of the funds in the Identification Fee Exemption Account to cover the fees and costs associated with complying with the requirements for obtaining a driver's license in Texas for this population (e.g. driving classes, driving practice time, testing fees). The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), which has a long history of working with youth in foster care and young adults experiencing homelessness, will evaluate youth eligibility and oversee the administration of the fee and cost waivers for driver's education, driving tests, etc.

Not only will young people benefit from receiving a driver's license and the independence associated with it, they will also be connected to other TWC programs that promote success in early adulthood for these populations.

