



Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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February 1, 2022

TO: Members
Joint Committee on Finance

FROM: Bob Lang, Director

SUBJECT: University of Wisconsin System: Section 13.10 Request for Release of Funding for Foster Youth Programs -- Agenda Item VI

REQUEST

On November 16, 2021, the UW System submitted a request under s. 13.10 of the statutes for release of \$250,000 GPR in 2021-22 and \$500,000 GPR in 2022-23 for foster youth programs.

BACKGROUND

Under 2021 Assembly Bill 68/Senate Bill 111 as introduced (the Governor's 2021-23 budget bill), \$500,000 GPR would have been provided annually in a new, annual appropriation for foster youth support programs. Under the Governor's proposal, the Board of Regents would have been required to allocate funding from this appropriation to each institution to establish or maintain support programs for students enrolled in the institution who formerly resided in a foster home or group home. The types of programs supported by these funds could have included any of the following: (a) scholarships; (b) employment; (c) emergency funds; (d) basic supplies; (e) mentorships to assist with academic preparations and successful navigation of the complex college environment; or (f) other resources such as career planning, financial literacy training, and math and writing support. Under 2021 Act 58, funding for the program (\$250,000 GPR in 2021-22 and \$500,000 GPR in 2022-23) is provided in the Joint Committee on Finance supplemental appropriation for release to the UW System upon request and approval by the Committee for UW System foster youth programs.

Many states have tuition-waiver programs that allow foster youth to attend public institutions at no charge or for significantly reduced rates, but there is no such program in Wisconsin, nor are there any state scholarships targeted specifically to students who were formerly in foster care. However, the federal Chafee Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program, funded under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, provides vouchers for post-secondary education and training

available to youths who have aged out of out-of-home care. Wisconsin received \$755,000 in federal funds from the ETV program for federal fiscal year 2021. Youths may receive services funded under ETV if they meet state eligibility criteria for the independent living program and federal ETV eligibility requirements, which Department of Children and Family (DCF) staff note is a more limited population than all youth who have experienced foster care. A youth is eligible for the ETV program if he or she exited an out-of-home care or court-ordered kinship care placement at age 18 or went into court-ordered guardianship or was adopted after the age of 16. All ETV funds are awarded under the Brighter Star program through the transitional resource agencies.

Research suggests a small percentage of individuals formerly in foster care attend postsecondary education and only a small percentage of those students receive degrees within five or six years. The Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago conducted a longitudinal study, the Midwest Study, of individuals who had formerly been in foster care in Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin. At the beginning of the study, all of the individuals were 17 years old and had been in foster care for at least one year. The first round of interviews began in 2002 and subsequent interviews occurred when most of the respondents were 19, 21, 23 or 24, and 26. Chapin Hall released separate reports for each of the three states following the interviews that took place when the individuals formerly in foster care were 19 and 21. At age 19, 16.5% of individuals who had formerly been in foster care in Wisconsin were enrolled in a vocational training program or a two-year college while 6.7% were enrolled in a four-year college or university. At age 21, 10.8% were enrolled in a two-year college and 5.7% were enrolled in a four-year college or university. Data from all three states shows that 8.1% of respondents were enrolled in a two-year college and 4.2% were enrolled in a four-year college or university at age 23 or 24.

While the federal ETV (Brighter Star) program and tuition waiver programs in other states make postsecondary education more economically viable for young people aging out of foster care, they do not address nonfinancial needs. The budget bill proposed funding was intended to be utilized for supporting and expanding the Fostering Success programs at several UW-System institutions. These programs support students who have been in foster care (and other students who have experienced homelessness or were orphaned) by focusing on recruitment, retention, and graduation. The initial program began at UW-Stout in the admissions office through a one-time grant from DCF and continued primarily through private donations. As part of their Fostering Success program, UW-Stout provides information for other campuses interested in developing their own Fostering Success programs.

ANALYSIS

Under the request, the \$250,000 GPR in 2021-22 and \$500,000 GPR in 2022-23 provided under Act 58 would be utilized to support existing and establish new Fostering Success programs at UW System campuses. However, UW indicates that the first grant cycle may favor established programs over new programs to allow time for universities with newer programs to customize their program to best support the needs of foster youth on their campus. Currently, UW-Eau Claire, UW-Milwaukee, UW-Stout and UW-Whitewater offer Fostering Success programs, with UW-Stout and UW-Milwaukee having the most established programs. The Fostering Success programs provide wrap-around services grounded in trauma-informed care for students. The programs inform students

about available grants and scholarships as well as provide supplemental advising about courses and connect students to available resources, including housing, food, clothing, transportation, health and wellness, and employment.

Currently, funding for Fostering Success programs varies by campus. At UW-Stout, the program partners with the campus's student support services funded through federal TRIO grants, which provide academic support and services for first-generation students, students who meet federal low income criteria, and students with disabilities. These services include financial literacy coaching, writing and math specialists, and tutoring. By partnering with the TRIO program, UW-Stout's director indicates the minimum annual Fostering Success program operating budget is approximately \$15,000. The program director indicates over 80% of program funds are utilized for activities that directly benefit students including scholarships, paid work positions within the program, emergency funds, and basic supplies (hygiene, clothes, food, and school supplies). Budgeted staff time by the Fostering Success Director and Support Services advisor together make up a 0.10 FTE position funded through UW-Stout through private donations to the Stout Foundation for Fostering Success. UW-Stout also provides GPR funding for a 0.05 FTE administrative support, and provides funding for the program through federal work-study funds and a graduate assistant position funded from program revenue (tuition) funds which the program applies for on an annual basis. Community grants and private donations provide the remaining program funding. If the program were not partnered with TRIO, the director estimates annual costs would be approximately \$100,000 annually.

At UW-Milwaukee, the program coordinator indicates that 25% of their position, which is funded through GPR, is allocated to the Fostering Success coordinator work, and that the program has no other dedicated budget and relies heavily on volunteers and donations. The coordinator is responsible for leading the Fostering Success at UWM Committee, a group of volunteers which includes faculty, alumni, and community members. They also coordinate student outreach to both prospective and current students through monthly emails, phone call campaigns, and college and career fairs. They also manage donation campaigns and apply for grants to support the program (the program receives grants and donations of between \$5,000 and \$10,000 annually). Similar to Stout, and depending on available donations, the UWM program provides academic and wellness supplies to students including welcome bags, book gift cards, and linens. There are several activities that UWM would like to provide through their program if they were to receive additional program funding, such as a one to two-night summer camp for high school students (a program UW-Stout currently offers through their program), foster care awareness month activities, scholarship funding, and peer mentors and professional in-depth coaches to help students navigate life transitions into college, throughout college, and post-graduation.

Under the request, funds would be dispersed to system institutions using a grant process through a request for proposals (RFP) process. A steering committee would be created to oversee the grant program selection process. In their request, UW System specifies that they request the \$500,000 in 2022-23 be included in the UW-System's base budget as ongoing funding.

According to the request, administrative costs would make up 10% of funds each year (\$25,000 in 2021-22 and \$50,000 annually thereafter) to develop and implement the RFP, provide technical assistance to campuses to establish or expand programs, and collaborate with statewide

foster youth partners to design programs that best meet student needs. The remaining funding (\$225,000 in 2021-22 and \$450,000 annually thereafter) would be utilized for grants to establish or support existing Fostering Success programs. UW System points to the UW-Stout program's improvement in student retention as a key measure of the program's success. Preliminary retention data from UW-Stout indicates that when given support, former foster youth retention rates rival those of their non-foster care peers.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Approve the request and transfer \$250,000 GPR in 2021-22 and \$500,000 GPR in 2022-23 held in reserve for this purpose from the Committee's s. 20.865(4)(a) appropriation to the UW System's s. 20.285(1)(a) appropriation. Specify that the \$500,000 in 2022-23 is ongoing.
2. Deny the request.

Prepared by: Erin Probst