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Bill addressing independent living programs goes to Governor

HB 2344 adjusts requirements for foster care youth transitioning to adult life

SALEM – The Oregon Senate voted today to add volunteering to the list of activities that can be required in the Department of Human Services' Independent Living Program, which helps prepare foster children for adult life.

House Bill 2344 – which passed by a 27-0 vote on the Senate floor – modifies the requirements for the program and adds volunteerism as a possible activity requirement that may be included in a client's independent living plan. It also adds transportation to the list of expenses that DHS can cover for the client.

"Volunteering is a way for young people to gain experience and skills necessary to be successful in life," said Sen. Michael Dembrow (D-Portland), who carried the bill in the Senate. "This bill allows another way for young people who have been in foster care and now are transitioning into a productive adult life to meet their requirements. It's good for our foster care clients in the program and it's good for communities, as we expect that this will develop some engaged life-long community volunteers."

The Independent Living Program helps young people who are, or were, in foster care develop into self-sufficient adults. The program provides young people with the skills necessary to transition from state or tribal custody to living independently in their own communities.

The program currently is available to youth who are at least 16 years old and maintain education, employment or a combination of the two, amounting to a full-time obligation. DHS also can establish a budget and make payments covering needs like food, shelter, clothing and incidental expenses, based on the agreement, to the client.

House Bill 2234 modifies the eligibility qualifications to include unmarried individuals between the ages of 16 and 20, and have the skills and level of responsibility needed to transition into adulthood, as determined by DHS. The bill allows volunteerism to be included in the list of activity requirements alongside work and education.

HB 2344 now goes to the Gov. Kate Brown for signature.

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