

The Mockingbird Society

2010 ADVOCACY AGENDA

Retain Quality Programs for Children and Youth in Foster Care

The state of Washington is facing a 2.6 billion dollar deficit and the challenge is to balance the budget without harming the children, youth and families in the child welfare system. The Governor's proposed budget cuts will hurt the safety, permanency and well being of dependent youth. We must prioritize basic needs. The state of Washington has an obligation to care for and support dependent children and youth.

LEAD PRIORITIES:

1. Safe Housing and Support For Youth in Care: Save the HOPE in the HOPE Act!

Under Age 18: Passed in 1999 the HOPE Act provides 2 critical services to adolescents in the foster care system

- **Retain the HOPE beds:** 30 day emergency shelter for teenagers who are on the streets or on a runaway status. HOPE beds are the only beds in the State of Washington that adolescents can self-refer to. HOPE beds provide safe emergency care and reduce the length of time adolescents are on runaway status. The HOPE beds are targeted to both adolescents who are legal dependents of Washington State as well as those who are from private families. **Request:** Restore full funding of the HOPE Center beds
- **Retain Responsible Living Skills Programs (RLSP):** RLSP beds are long term programs targeting older youth in the foster care system who have experienced multiple placements and educational changes. Typically family reunification is not considered probable and the RLSP are designed to support the "readiness" of older youth to exit the foster care system. **Request:** Restore full funding of the Responsible Living Skills Program

Over Age 18: Approximately 465 youth exit Washington's foster care system each year. Safe housing is crucial to their ability to achieve their educational and employment goals.

- **Retain the Foster Care to 21 and Independent Youth Housing Program:** Washington State has been a leader in developing safe housing for youth being discharged from the foster care system. The federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act provides a 50% match to those states that offer safe housing to youth exiting foster care.

2. Notification of the Right to Request Counsel in Dependency Proceeding:

Current law allows youth 12 and older to request an attorney to represent them in Dependency hearings. The judge makes the final determination based on several factors including the availability of resources and attorneys. The 2010 legislative request is to require DSHS and the GAL/CASA to notify youth age 12 and older of their right to request an attorney in their Dependency Hearing and be informed of the Reinstatement law.

3. Adding Youth or Alumni of Foster Care to the HB 2106 Transformation Design Committee (TDC):

HB 2106 calls for major child welfare system reform and the TDC is charged with developing the plan for this system-wide reform. Currently an alumni of care sits on the TDC but legislation is required to formalize this position on the TDC and to give full voting rights to the Youth/Alumni representative. The Mockingbird Society will continue to follow closely any proposed legislation regarding HB 2106.

SUPPORTING PRIORITIES:

1. Subsidized Guardianships (HB 2680):

The federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act contains a section that allows states to provide increased support to kinship families with the intent of reducing the number of children who enter and remain in foster care.

2. Expanding Sealing Juvenile Records (SB 6561):

Ensures that young people who have committed a crime but fulfilled all of the court requirements, including no further infractions with the law, are able to have their record sealed. This will allow the youth to engage in gainful employment, secure college scholarships and continue to create a positive future by having their juvenile record sealed.

3. 8 Hour Notification (HB 2752 & SB 6446):

Currently staff who work at emergency shelters for youth must report the youth within 8 hours to DSHS, family or law enforcement. Shelter providers believe this law pushes youth deeper underground into the hands of predators. The request is to expand this to 72 hours which would allow time for staff to develop a relationship with the youth and engage them in services including reunification to family when appropriate.

Join Us for Youth Advocacy Day!

Friday, February 19th, 2010

9:30 AM - 3:00 PM

Capitol Campus
Tivoli Fountain/North Diagonal Area
Olympia, WA

Food Provided

For more information, to RSVP, or volunteer contact Jim Theofelis or Kara Sanders at 206-323-5437.