

2023 -- H 6189

LC002468

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2023

A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- TUITION WAIVER PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN IN
RHODE ISLAND FOSTER CARE

Introduced By: Representatives Casimiro, Noret, Serpa, Spears, Roberts, Diaz, and
Morales

Date Introduced: March 22, 2023

Referred To: House Finance

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Title 16 of the General Laws entitled "EDUCATION" is hereby amended by
2 adding thereto the following chapter:

3 CHAPTER 112

4 TUITION WAIVER PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN IN RHODE ISLAND FOSTER CARE

5 **16-112-1. Short title.**

6 This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the "Tuition Waiver Program for Children
7 in Rhode Island Foster Care."

8 **16-112-2. Legislative findings and purpose.**

9 (a) There are many children in the custody of the department of children, youth, and
10 families ("DCYF") who have been in DCYF custody for several years and who have no family
11 resources or whose families have limited ability to provide funds for post-secondary education.
12 These children often possess the academic ability and the interest to pursue higher educational
13 goals, but are precluded from doing so because of the lack of family resources to assist in funding.

14 (b) The state has already invested considerable funds in children in DCYF custody through
15 the funding of residential placements, foster care, counseling services, and health care.

16 (c) Children in the care of the state or aging out of foster care have poor educational
17 outcomes that have been documented, and few achieve college graduation without substantial
18 assistance. The purpose, and goal of this chapter is to improve outcomes for current and former

1 foster youth who need support to improve educational attainment. Investment in their education
2 will help to ensure a successful transition to adulthood free of dependence on government support.

3 (d) To afford youth in foster care the opportunity comparable to children not in state
4 custody who often enjoy greater opportunities to draw from family and other resources, there is
5 hereby established the tuition waiver program for children in Rhode Island foster care.

6 **16-112-3. Establishment of tuition waiver program.**

7 Beginning with the high school graduating class of 2023, there is hereby established the
8 tuition waiver program for children in Rhode Island foster care. This program shall cover the costs
9 of mandatory fees and tuition to attain a degree or certificate at one of the state colleges or university
10 as defined in § 16-112-4. The general assembly shall annually appropriate the funds necessary to
11 implement the purposes of this chapter. Additional funds beyond the waivers may be appropriated
12 to support and advance the program. In addition to appropriation by the general assembly,
13 charitable donations may be accepted into the program.

14 **16-112-4. Definitions.**

15 When used in this chapter, the following terms shall have the following meanings:

16 (1) "Certificate" means any certificate program with labor market value as defined by the
17 postsecondary commissioner.

18 (2) "Department" means the department of children, youth, and families.

19 (3) "General education coursework" means the educational foundation of knowledge,
20 skills, and attitudes that prepare recipient students for success in their majors and their personal and
21 professional lives after graduation. It includes, but is not limited to, the required coursework of all
22 degrees developed by each state college and university that is approved by the council on
23 postsecondary education that is intended to ensure that all graduates of a state institution have a
24 balanced core of competencies and knowledge. This is not limited to coursework specifically
25 required for one's major.

26 (4) "Mandatory fees and tuition" means the costs that every student is required to pay in
27 order to enroll in classes, and does not include room and board, textbooks, program fees that may
28 exist in some majors, course fees that may exist for some specific courses, meal plans, or travel.

29 (5) "On track to graduate on time" means the standards determined by the state colleges
30 and the state university in establishing the expectation of a student to graduate with an associate's
31 degree within two (2) years, or a bachelor's degree within four (4) years of enrollment, or the
32 prescribed completion time for a student completing a certificate, or the prescribed time for a
33 student to obtain the degree or certificate on a part-time basis. In promulgating this section, the
34 general assembly recognizes that some students, including, but not limited to, students who require

1 developmental education, may require an extended time period for degree completion.

2 (6) "Program" means the tuition waiver program for children in Rhode Island foster care
3 established in this chapter.

4 (7) "Recipient student" means a student attending the community college of Rhode Island,
5 Rhode Island college, or the university of Rhode Island, who qualifies to receive the tuition waiver
6 pursuant to this chapter.

7 (8) "State" means the State of Rhode Island.

8 (9) "State colleges and university" means the community college of Rhode Island, Rhode
9 Island college, and the university of Rhode Island, as well as any other state colleges or university
10 subsequently established by the state, if any.

11 **16-112-5. Administration of scholarship program.**

12 (a) Each year the department shall identify and notify from among youth in its legal
13 custody, or who were in the department's legal custody for a period of time between the ages of
14 fourteen (14) years and twenty-one (21) years, or participated in the voluntary extension of care,
15 pursuant to § 14-1-6, between the ages of eighteen (18) years and twenty-one (21) years, and those
16 other youth and students identified in § 16-112-6, as those students eligible for a tuition waiver
17 through this program. The department shall notify and inform the youth and the foster parent(s), if
18 applicable, of the existence of the program and of the student's eligibility for a tuition waiver
19 pursuant to the program. Such notice may be provided in writing, virtually, by electronic mail, by
20 telephone, or any other means to ensure the youth and foster parent(s) of the program are notified
21 and informed. The youth or foster parent shall request that the department contact the admissions
22 office at any state college or university which the student wishes to attend. The financial aid office,
23 in conjunction with the admissions office, at each state college or university shall coordinate to
24 ensure the tuition waiver is applied to the eligible student in foster care to ensure that person
25 becomes a recipient student.

26 (b) A waiver under the program may cover the cost of up to four (4) years of mandatory
27 fees and tuition for full-time attendance by the recipient student and for the recipient student to
28 complete general education coursework and be on track to graduate on time and obtain a certificate,
29 associate's degree, or bachelor's degree; provided, a state college or university may permit a
30 recipient student to attend classes on a part-time basis, and the waiver shall be in an amount up to
31 what it would have cost the recipient student to attend the state college or university as a full-time
32 student until attainment of their first certificate, associate degree, or bachelor's degree, while
33 utilizing the waiver provided under this program.

34 (c) The program is limited to one award per student per year, for up to four (4) years, unless

1 the student is attending on a part-time basis, in which case the waiver shall be equal to the total cost
2 it would take for a student attending the state college or university to complete a program and obtain
3 a degree or a certificate if the recipient student was attending the state college or university on a
4 full-time basis.

5 **16-112-6. Eligibility.**

6 (a) Persons eligible to participate in this program as recipient students are as follows:

7 (1) Children and youth who are currently or were in foster care for a substantial period of
8 time between the ages of fourteen (14) years and twenty-one (21) years;

9 (2) Young adults who are eligible for or currently participating in the voluntary extension
10 of care, pursuant to § 14-1-6;

11 (3) Youth who exited foster care between the ages of eighteen (18) years and twenty-one
12 (21) years, inclusive;

13 (4) Youth who left foster care at age fourteen (14) years or older for guardianship or
14 adoption, until they reach age of twenty-six (26) years.

15 (5) Youth who had been in foster care for a substantial period of time between the ages of
16 fourteen (14) years and twenty-one (21) years, or were participating in the voluntary extension of
17 care, pursuant to § 14-1-6, and left this status for some reason other than aging out of foster care,
18 kinship, guardianship or adoption;

19 (6) Children likely to remain in foster care until age eighteen (18) years;

20 (7) Youth in foster care who have graduated from high school or received the equivalent
21 of a high school diploma; and

22 (8) Youth in foster care who have not reached their twenty-sixth birthday.

23 **16-112-7. Appropriation, regulation, and reporting.**

24 (a) The general assembly shall appropriate sufficient sums to implement the provisions of
25 this chapter. These monies are to be used exclusively to fund tuition waivers awards to recipient
26 students.

27 (b) The department, in consultation with the state colleges and university, shall provide an
28 annual report to the governor and the general assembly by November 1, 2024, and annually by
29 November 1 thereafter, that accounts for the expenditures made pursuant to this chapter, including
30 the amounts awarded to each recipient student, each awardee's unmet need, the total number of
31 waivers granted, and the number of recipient students per academic year who made satisfactory
32 progress towards completing their higher education degree or certificate, and are on track to
33 graduate on time, as reported to the department by the community college of Rhode Island, Rhode
34 Island college, and the university of Rhode Island.

1 (c) The department, in consultation with the state colleges and university, may promulgate
2 rules and regulations to implement the provisions of this chapter.

3 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect on July 1, 2023.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF

A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- TUITION WAIVER PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN IN
RHODE ISLAND FOSTER CARE

1 This act would establish the tuition waiver program for children in Rhode Island foster care
2 program. The purpose would be to increase the number of youths in foster care enrolling in and
3 obtaining degrees in a timely fashion from a state college or university. In addition, the act would
4 permit charitable donations to the scholarship program as well as an annual appropriation by the
5 general assembly.

6 This act would take effect on July 1, 2023.

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