

2024 -- H 7905

LC005066

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2024

A N A C T

RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- TUITION WAIVER PILOT PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

Introduced By: Representatives Casimiro, Noret, Caldwell, Boylan, McGaw, Kazarian, Diaz, Tanzi, and Cruz

Date Introduced: March 04, 2024

Referred To: House Finance

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Title 42 of the General Laws entitled "STATE AFFAIRS AND
2 GOVERNMENT" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following chapter:

3 CHAPTER 72.13

4 TUITION WAIVER PILOT PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

5 **42-72.13-1. Statement of purpose.**

6 (a) There are many children in the custody of the department of children, youth, and
7 families ("DCYF") who have been in DCYF custody for several years and who have no family
8 resources or whose families have limited ability to provide funds for post-secondary education.

9 These children often possess the academic ability and the interest to pursue higher educational
10 goals, but are precluded from doing so because of the lack of family resources to assist in funding.

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

13 (c) Children in the care of the state or aging out of foster care have poor educational
14 outcomes that have been documented, and few achieve college graduation without substantial
15 assistance. The purpose, and goal of this chapter is to improve outcomes for current and former
16 foster youth who need support to improve educational attainment. Investment in their education
17 will help to ensure a successful transition to adulthood free of dependence on government support.

18 (d) To afford youth in foster care the opportunity comparable to children not in state

1 custody who often enjoy greater opportunities to draw from family and other resources, there is
2 hereby established the tuition waiver pilot program for children in Rhode Island foster care.

3 **42-72.13-2. Definitions.**

4 As used in this chapter:

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

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

8 (3) "General education coursework" means the educational foundation of knowledge,
9 skills, and attitudes that prepare recipient students for success in their majors and their personal and
10 professional lives after graduation. It includes, but is not limited to, the required coursework of all
11 degrees developed by Rhode Island College that are approved by the council on postsecondary
12 education that are intended to ensure that all graduates of a state institution have a balanced core of
13 competencies and knowledge. General education course work is not limited to coursework
14 specifically required for one's major.

15 (4) "Mandatory fees and tuition" means the costs that every student is required to pay in
16 order to enroll in classes, and shall include room and board, program fees that may exist in some
17 majors, course fees that may exist for some specific courses, fees for summer programs, and meal
18 plans.

19 (5) "On track to graduate on time" means the standards determined by Rhode Island
20 College in establishing the expectation of a student to graduate with an associate's degree within
21 two (2) years, or a bachelor's degree within four (4) years of enrollment, or the prescribed
22 completion time for a student completing a certificate, or the prescribed time for a student to obtain
23 the degree or certificate on a part-time basis. In promulgating this section, the general assembly
24 recognizes that some students, including, but not limited to, students who require developmental
25 education, may require an extended time period for degree completion.

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

28 (7) "Recipient student" means a student attending Rhode Island College who qualifies to
29 receive the tuition waiver pursuant to this chapter.

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

31 **42-72.13-3. Administration of scholarship program.**

32 (a) Commencing with the 2025 school year and until the 2031 school year, the department
33 shall identify and notify from among youth in its legal custody, or who were in the department's
34 legal custody for a period of time between the ages of fourteen (14) years and twenty-one (21)

1 years, or participated in the voluntary extension of care, pursuant to § 14-1-6, between the ages of
2 eighteen (18) years and twenty-one (21) years, and those other youth and students identified in §
3 42-72.13-4, as those students eligible for a tuition waiver through this chapter.

4 (b) Notice and confirmation of acceptance. The department shall notify and inform the
5 youth and the foster parent(s), if applicable, of the existence of the program and of the student's
6 eligibility for a tuition waiver pursuant to this chapter. Such notice may be provided in writing,
7 virtually, by electronic mail, or by telephone. Provided, further, the department shall provide
8 information about the program on its website and any social media platforms utilized by the
9 department. The eligible student or foster parent shall acknowledge receipt of the program
10 information by requesting that the department contact the admissions office of Rhode Island Collee
11 in order to enroll the student in the program. The Rhode Island College admissions office, in
12 conjunction with the financial aid office, shall coordinate and take measures to ensure the tuition
13 waiver is correctly applied to the eligible student in foster care and notify the student of acceptance
14 and enrollment in the scholarship program.

15 (c) Tuition waiver -- Scope. A tuition waiver under this chapter may cover the cost of up
16 to four (4) years of mandatory fees and tuition for full-time attendance by the recipient student and
17 for the recipient student to complete general education coursework and be on track to graduate on
18 time and obtain a certificate, associate's degree, or bachelor's degree; provided, Rhode Island
19 College may permit a recipient student to attend classes on a part-time basis, and the waiver shall
20 be in an amount up to what it would have cost the recipient student to attend Rhode Island College
21 as a full-time student until attainment of their first certificate, associate's degree, or bachelor's
22 degree, while utilizing the waiver provided under this chapter.

23 (d) Allocation. The tuition waiver, subject to eligible student demand and available
24 funding, is limited to a maximum of twenty (20) students, but in no event shall the number be less
25 than ten (10) students for the period of the program. Individual students are eligible for one award
26 per year, for up to four (4) years, unless the student is attending on a part-time basis, in which case
27 the waiver shall be equal to the total cost it would take for a student attending Rhode Island College
28 to obtain a degree or a certificate if the recipient student was attending Rhode Island College on a
29 full-time basis.

30 **42-72.13-4. Eligibility -- Selection of scholarship recipients.**

31 Persons eligible to participate in this program as recipient students are as follows:

32 (1) Children and youth who are currently or were in foster care for a six (6) months or more
33 between the ages of fourteen (14) years and twenty-one (21) years;

34 (2) Young adults who are eligible for or currently participating in the voluntary extension

1 of care, pursuant to § 14-1-6;

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

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

6 (5) Youth who had been in foster care for six (6) months or more between the ages of
7 fourteen (14) years and twenty-one (21) years, or were participating in the voluntary extension of
8 care, pursuant to § 14-1-6, and left this status for some reason other than aging out of foster care,
9 kinship, guardianship or adoption;

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

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

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

14 **42-72.13-5. Appropriation.**

15 (a) The general assembly shall appropriate, out of money in the treasury not otherwise
16 appropriated for the fiscal year 2024-2025, the sum of two hundred thousand dollars (\$200,000) to
17 implement the provisions of this chapter. These monies are to be used exclusively to fund tuition
18 waiver awards to recipient students pursuant to this chapter.

19 (b) In addition to any appropriations from the general assembly pursuant to this chapter,
20 charitable donations and federal funds may be accepted to fund the program.

21 **42-72.13-6. Report.**

22 The department, in consultation with Rhode Island College, shall provide an annual report
23 to the governor and the general assembly by November 1, 2025, and annually by November 1
24 thereafter, that accounts for the expenditures made pursuant to this chapter, including the amounts
25 awarded to each recipient student, each awardee's unmet need, the total number of waivers granted,
26 and the number of recipient students per academic year who made satisfactory progress towards
27 completing their higher education degree or certificate, and are on track to graduate on time, as
28 reported to the department by Rhode Island College.

29 **42-72.13-7. Rules and regulations.**

30 The department, in consultation with Rhode Island College, may promulgate rules and
31 regulations to implement the provisions of this chapter.

32 **42-72.13-8. Sunset.**

33 The provisions of this chapter shall sunset on July 1, 2031, at which time the pilot program
34 shall end.

1 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect on July 1, 2024.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF

A N A C T

RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- TUITION WAIVER PILOT
PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN IN 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 Rhode Island College.

4 This act would take effect on July 1, 2024.

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