

## Fostering Higher Education Success

### Tuition & Fee Exemption for Florida's Foster Youth

An examination of the efficacy of existing efforts, barriers to usage, and recommendations for reform.



## Introduction

Nationwide, former foster youth struggle to complete college.<sup>1</sup> Though 70% of them want a college degree, only 3 to 11% are able to obtain that degree – a stark contrast to the 28% of adults in the general population.<sup>2</sup> Fortunately, Florida is a leader among the states that are trying to help more former foster youth obtain higher education. Florida was part of the original cadre of states in the late 1980s that began offering assistance with higher education to students leaving foster care. Today, Florida remains a national leader in the depth and breadth of its offer of assistance to former foster youth seeking higher education.<sup>3</sup>

As we demonstrate, however, that promise of educational access is not always fulfilled. Only 15% of eligible youth currently use the tuition and fee exemption. There are a number of barriers that keep eligible students from accessing existing state support for higher education. Though some barriers will take sustained efforts to address, most of those barriers can be addressed with minor adjustments to existing policies and practices. We hope this paper will inspire educators, advocates, schools and state entities to work together to make the systemic changes needed to improve student access to state support for higher education.

This paper briefly provides the history of the tuition and fee exemption, describes how institutions implement the exemption; shows how often it is used; which youth are excluded, and explains the barriers to increased participation. It then offers simple suggestions for increasing the participation of former foster youth in higher education.

### I. Florida's Tuition & Fee Exemption – Its Origins & Current Statute

Florida first enacted a law providing a fee exemption for youth in foster care in 1988.<sup>4</sup> The initial exemption was provided to young adults in foster care (at the time youth could be in state care to age 21). Before obtaining the exemption, students had to apply for and be denied financial aid that covered the payment of all undergraduate fees. The exemption was limited to 4 years (8 semesters) with the possibility of extending to 5 years (10 semesters) if the recipient had to take college preparatory classes or needed extra time to pass communication and computation skills testing. Students had to maintain a 2.0 GPA.

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<sup>1</sup> The terms “foster youth” and “foster care” are used in the broadest sense to include all children who were removed from their parents by the state, including those placed with relatives, non-relatives and in group care settings.

<sup>2</sup> Foster Care By the Numbers, Casey Family Programs, available at: <http://www.casey.org/press/mediakit/pdf/FosterCareByTheNumbers.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> At least 20 other states provide some form of assistance to foster youth. Their assistance ranges from prioritizing foster youth for existing grants (South Carolina) to tuition, fees, books, room & board (North Carolina). Information on most state programs is available at: <http://www.nrcyd.ou.edu/state-pages/search>.

<sup>4</sup> Florida Statute §240.235(6)(a) (1988). See Appendix A for the text of the statute.

The Florida Legislature demonstrated its commitment to improving access to higher education for foster youth with a series of changes to the law. In 1997, it expanded the tuition and fee exemption to all cover all children adopted from DCF custody after May 5, 1997. More recently, the Legislature recognized the difficulties that former foster youth have in completing higher education upon emancipation, and expanded the exemption to cover students until age 28. The current statute does not have a GPA requirement or limitation as to the number of credit hours or semesters for which it is available. Plainly, the Legislature intended to broaden the scope of students eligible to participate in recognition of the hardships former foster youth have to overcome, as well as to encourage adults to adopt children from foster care. The statute currently provides:

**1009.25 Fee exemptions. —**

(1) The following students are exempt from the payment of tuition and fees, including lab fees, at a school district that provides postsecondary career programs, Florida College System institution, or state university:

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(c) A student who is or was at the time he or she reached 18 years of age in the custody of the Department of Children and Family Services or who, after spending at least 6 months in the custody of the department after reaching 16 years of age, was placed in a guardianship by the court. Such exemption includes fees associated with enrollment in career-preparatory instruction. The exemption remains valid until the student reaches 28 years of age.

(d) A student who is or was at the time he or she reached 18 years of age in the custody of a relative under s. [39.5085](#) or who was adopted from the Department of Children and Family Services after May 5, 1997. Such exemption includes fees associated with enrollment in career-preparatory instruction. The exemption remains valid until the student reaches 28 years of age.

## **II. Implementation of the Tuition and Fee Exemption**

The tuition and fee exemption applies to three types of institutions: universities, colleges and post-secondary career programs, i.e. career/technical institutions. Universities and colleges have their own governing bodies, and colleges and post-secondary career programs come under the governance of the Department of Education. There are, however, no uniform rules, policies or procedures that direct institutions how to implement the statute.

### **A. Implementation in the State University System (“SUS”).**

The State University System is comprised of 11 universities that operate under a Board of Governors (“BOG”) to whom the Legislature has provided rulemaking authority.<sup>5</sup> The BOG promulgated Rule 7.008 Waiver of Tuition and

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<sup>5</sup> Fla. Stat. §1001.706(2). See Appendix A for the text of the statute.

Fees, which addresses the tuition and fee exemption for former foster youth. The BOG's rule limits eligible recipients to students enrolled in undergraduate degree programs and caps the number of credit hours at 120.<sup>6</sup>

A review of each university's website, conducted in 2012, showed that:

- 5 universities had a policy or procedure that mentioned the tuition and fee exemption
- 3 universities referenced a previous version of the statute
- 1 university left out a category of eligible youth, and
- 2 universities referenced the current version of the statute

All five universities with published information had at least one item of inaccurate information. A summary of our findings from the web-published information for colleges and universities is attached as Appendix B.

## **B. Implementation in the Florida College System**

The Florida College System is the coordinating body for 28 locally-governed public colleges, including community colleges and four-year degree institutions.<sup>7</sup> The coordinating body falls under the jurisdiction of the State Board of Education. The Chancellor of the Florida College System reports to the Commissioner of Education. Each institution, however, has its own Board of Trustees. The Chancellor of the Florida College System does not have authority over each member institution.

The State Board of Education has rulemaking authority and is statutorily mandated to create rules addressing specific aspects of the Florida College System including fees, budgeting, business and financial matters.<sup>8</sup> The State Board of Education has not promulgated any rules relating to the implantation of the tuition and fee exemption.

Although the Florida College System does not have rulemaking authority, it does publish a Guidelines and Procedures Manual, which is intended to "provide a reference point for local boards of trustees and college presidents to develop local policies."<sup>9</sup> The Manual does not address the tuition and fee exemption.

The Board of Trustees at each individual institution has the statutory authority to adopt its own rules, policies and procedures.<sup>10</sup> A 2012 survey of the websites for Florida College System institutions showed that only one, Broward

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<sup>6</sup> 7.008 Waiver of Tuition and Fees. See Appendix A for the text of the statute.

<sup>7</sup> Fla. Stat. §1001.60. See also, <http://www.fldoe.org/cc/overview.asp>

<sup>8</sup> Fla. Stat. §1001.02 General powers of State Board of Education.— See Appendix A for the text of the statute

<sup>9</sup> See, [http://www.fldoe.org/CC/policy/pdf/guidelines\\_procedures\\_manual.pdf](http://www.fldoe.org/CC/policy/pdf/guidelines_procedures_manual.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Fla. Stat. §1001.64 - Florida College System institution boards of trustees; powers and duties. See Appendix A for the text of the statute

College, had a substantive policy relating to the tuition and fee exemption. Broward Colleges limited students to 32 credit hours per year, 2 years or 4 semesters with possible extension for preparatory classes.<sup>11</sup> Five other colleges had some policy or procedure on their website – some with outdated information, others with potentially onerous paperwork requirements. See the Summary at Appendix B for more details.

### **C. Implementation in Post-Secondary Career Programs**

We were unable to find information concerning the implementation of tuition and fee exemption in post-secondary career programs.

## **III. Usage of the Tuition and Fees Exemption**

### **A. Eligible Population**

There are 4 categories of young adults who are eligible for the statutory tuition and fee exemption:

1. Students who were in the custody of DCF when they turned 18;
2. Students placed in the custody of relatives under Fla. Stat. 39.5085, the “relative caregiver program”;
3. Students who were adopted from DCF after May 5, 1997; and
4. Students who, having spent at least 6 months in DCF custody, were placed into guardianship after turning 16.

According to public records information provided by DCF in 2012, there were 12,756 adults aged 18-27 who fall into categories 2-4.<sup>12</sup> There were also 9,882 adults in that age range who were adopted from foster care in 1997 or later.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the potential population of eligible students totaled 22,638.

### **B. Actual Usage of Tuition and Fee Exemption**

We were able to obtain data from the State University System and the Department of Education on the number of students who use the tuition and fee exemption at all three types of eligible institutions: universities, colleges and post-secondary career programs. The charts demonstrate a clear upward trend in the number of students using the tuition and fee exemption.

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<sup>11</sup> Broward College Policy No. 6Hx2-5.11 Foster Care. See Composite Appendix A for the text of the Rule

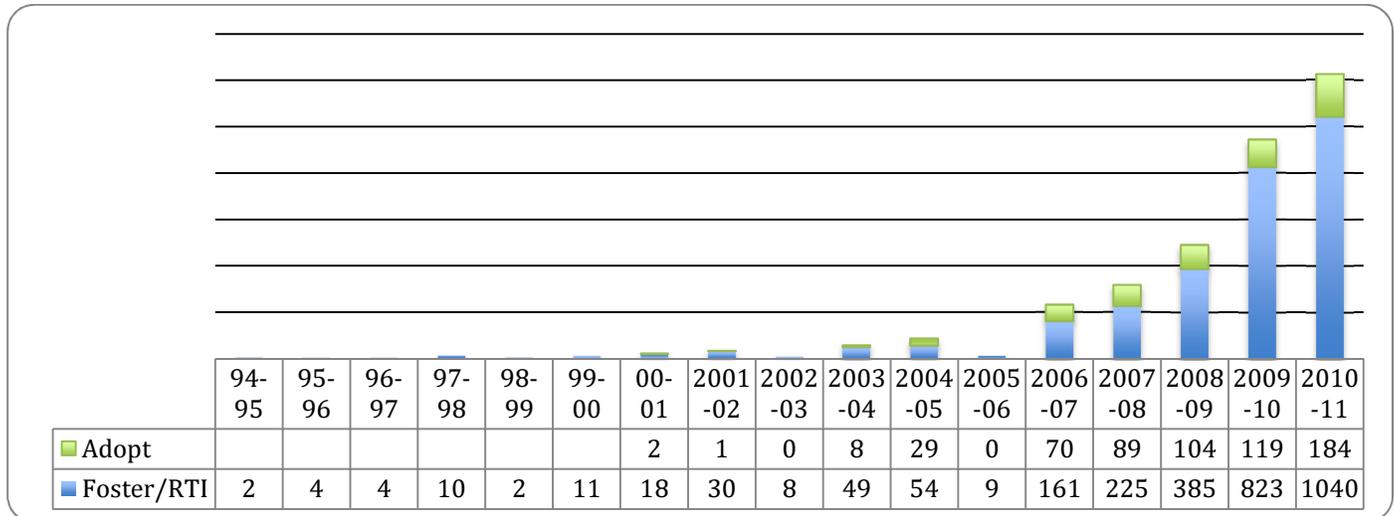
<sup>12</sup> See response to public records request received June 29, 2012. Excerpt at Appendix C.

<sup>13</sup> Adoption data for 1997 to 2010 was obtained from the National Data Archive for Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN) at Cornell University. It was provided with a notation that data from 1995-1999 is not considered to be reliable. Spreadsheet available upon request to [fef@floridaschildrenfirst.org](mailto:fef@floridaschildrenfirst.org). Included in this figure are adoptees from 2010 to the present

## 1. Number of Exemption Users in the State University System

The State University System has data going back to the 1994-95 school year tracking the use of the tuition exemption. The SUS data describes participants in two categories. Adoption and Road to Independence (RTI) – which prior to 2007-08 was called “Foster Care.” The data is reported in the chart below.

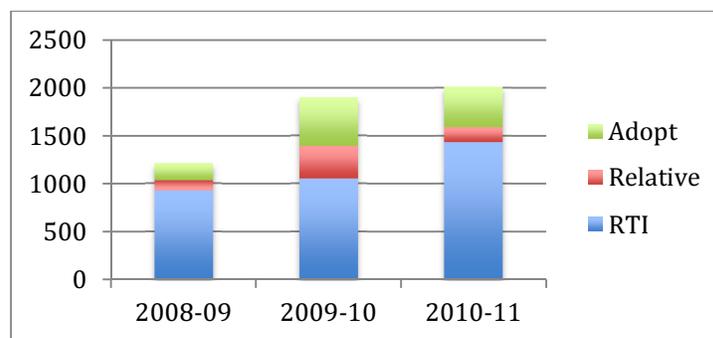
**Number of Students Using Tuition Exemption in State Universities**



## 2. Number of Exemption Users in the Florida College System

The Department of Education provided information on the Tuition Exemption for 2008-2011. DOE identifies students in three categories, those who were adopted, those placed with relatives and those who are on RTI. The relative and RTI numbers combine to what the SUS considers Foster/RTI.

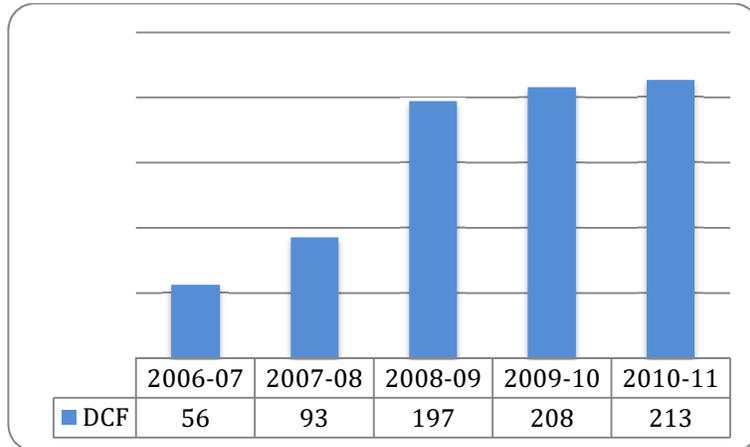
**Number of Students Using Tuition Exemption in Florida College System**



### 3. Number of Exemption Users in Career & Technical Schools

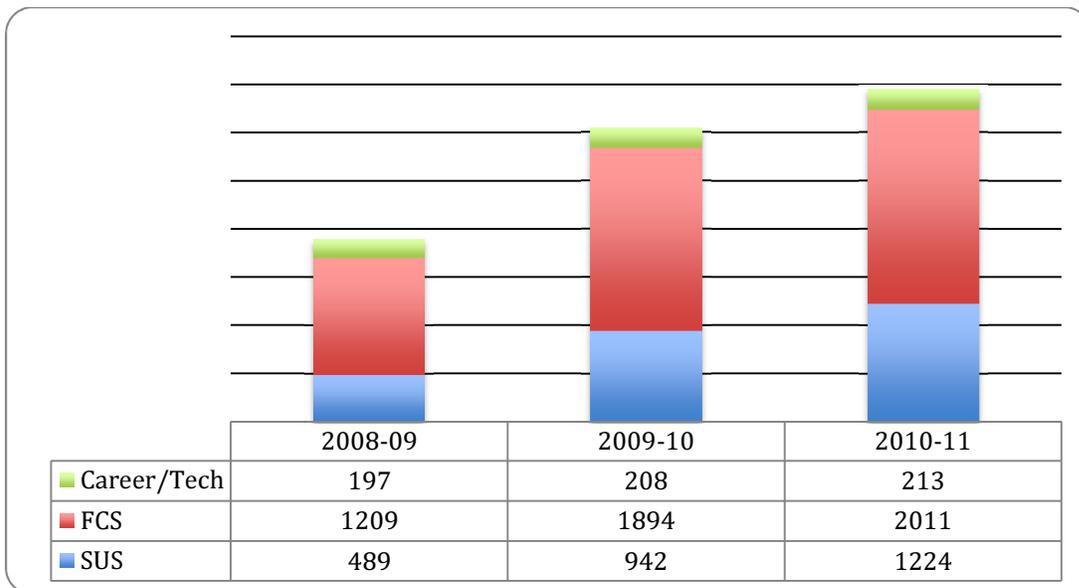
The Department of Education provided the number of students who used the tuition exemption for career and technical schools from 2006-07 to 2010-11. DOE did not differentiate among the categories of eligible students, referring to them simply as “DCF.”

#### **Number Exemption Users in Post-Secondary Career Programs**



### 4. Total Number of Exemption Users in all Institutions

#### **Overall Usage of Tuition Exemption**



**D. Percent of Students Using Tuition Exemption of Those Eligible**

Approximately 15% of the eligible population uses the tuition exemption – that is 3,448 students used tuition exemption out of a possible 22,638 total eligible.

**IV. Former Foster Youth Who Are Presently Ineligible for Tuition & Fee Exemption**

In addition to the students that are currently eligible to use the tuition and fee exemption, there are a number of young adults who were in state care but are not eligible for the exemption. These youth fall into five categories:

**A. Students who were placed with “non-relatives.”**

These youth were removed from their parents by the state, but rather than being placed in licensed foster care, or with a relative, they were placed with other individuals (teachers, coaches, neighbors, church friends, parents of friends, etc.). Children in non-relative placements remain party to open dependency court proceedings, but are considered to be in the “custody” of the non-relative rather than in the custody of the state. Non-relative caregivers receive no financial assistance for providing care. Approximately 9% of the children in out-of-home care are in non-relative placements.<sup>14</sup>

**B. Students placed with relatives, but not in the “Relative Caregiver Program.”**

There is a population of youth who were placed with relatives, but are not covered by the “Relative Caregiver Program,” Fla. Stat. 39.5085. That population includes students who were placed with relatives between 1985 and 1998 (when the Relative Caregiver program was created.) There are also some students who were placed with relatives after 1998 but who were not enrolled in the Relative Caregiver Program, usually because the family receives financial support for the child via Social Security benefits.

**C. Students Placed into Guardianship.**

Students placed into guardianship who did not have 6 months in licensed care prior to the guardianship (because they were placed with relative or non-relative) are not eligible. Nor are the students who were placed into guardianship prior to age 16.

**D. Students Adopted prior to May 5, 1997.**

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<sup>14</sup> Child Welfare Services Trend Report, data as of August 2012, available at <http://centerforchildwelfare.fmhi.usf.edu/DataReports/TrendReports.shtml>

### **E. Students Reunified prior to age 18.**

This is a broad ranging population. It includes some youth who were in out-of-home care for a number of years and reunified just weeks or months prior to turning 18.

## **V. Barriers to Accessing and Using Tuition & Fee Exemption**

Through our work with students and their adult supporters across the state, we have identified the following barriers that preclude eligible students from using the tuition and fee exemption to obtain higher education.

### **A. Onerous Paperwork Requirements and Procedural Hurdles.**

Only a few schools make an extra effort to attract and assist former foster youth. (See Appendix B for details about each school.) The majority are indifferent at best and obstructive at worst. Even though eligibility for tuition and fee exemption does not vary with circumstance, most schools require that students repeatedly prove eligibility every semester. For instance, the Broward College policy specifically states that the exemption is only good for one semester and requires that students reapply each semester. College of Central Florida requires students to procure paperwork directly from the Department of Children and Families rather than the Community Based Care Lead Agency, even though the child welfare functions have been privatized for over a decade.

At least one school, Santa Fe Community College, has a general policy requiring students using exemptions to wait until the last day of registration before they can register. Some schools require students to prove their Florida residency in addition to proving tuition and fee exemption eligibility.<sup>15</sup>

### **B. Limitation on Credit Hours and Courses**

The Florida statute does not place any limitation on the number of hours or types of courses that are exempted for eligible students. The limitations discussed below are imposed by rule or by written policies and practices that are de facto unpromulgated rules.

Many students cannot complete an undergraduate degree given the restriction on hours allotted by the State University System and some colleges.

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<sup>15</sup> C.f. Miami Dade College policy states: “Students who have tuition and fees waived or exempt according to the following sections of Florida Statutes shall be classified as Florida residents and shall not be required to submit additional residency documentation for tuition purposes for the duration of the exemption or waiver eligibility period.” <http://www.mdc.edu/main/flresidency/classification.aspx>

There are three reasons the current allotment is insufficient.

1. Many former foster youth must take remedial classes that don't count toward graduation, but that are counted in the 120 hour maximum for universities.
2. Some degree programs require more than 120 hours.
3. Just like their peers who did not grow up in state care, they may choose to change majors and need more credits. The average state university student in Florida takes 16 hours in excess of the 120 hour requirement for most degrees.<sup>16</sup> Former foster youth who have little or no on-going adult guidance or support may have an even more difficult time selecting the right path and staying on it to graduate with minimal coursework.

Other students are required to pay tuition for courses that do count toward graduation but are excluded from the tuition exemption. Students who have the opportunity to take graduate classes as undergraduates are required to pay tuition by some schools. At the other end of the spectrum, students who have to repeat a class for a third time are charged out-of-state tuition for the course. We have heard, but cannot confirm, that at some schools students who choose to register before the last day of registration have to pay as well.

### **C. Eligible Students Are Not Aware of the Exemption.**

Each year, Florida colleges and universities enroll students who are not aware that they are eligible for the tuition and fee exemption. We suspect this is primarily a problem for students who were not in licensed care when they turned 18 – and therefore did not have the ongoing support of an independent living caseworker. Another reason for this disconnect might be that many former foster youth are not ready to begin higher education until their early 20s after they have no further legal relationship with their Community Based Care provider. In any event, we have heard of a number of youth who have paid for tuition when, in fact, they were entitled to the exemption.

Most school websites do not inform students about the tuition waiver. (See Exhibit B.) Even the Florida Department of Education website does not adequately inform students about the exemption. Nor does it appear that schools use the data from the financial aid form to alert students to the possibility that they might qualify for the exemption.

### **D. Lack of Eligibility**

As noted in the preceding section, there is a cohort of students who come

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<sup>16</sup> See, Florida Board of Governors, Information Brief, Vol 1., Issue 4, *How Long do Students Take to Graduate in the State University System* (2004).

from similar circumstances but are not currently eligible for the tuition exemption under the statute.

## **V. Recommended Solutions**

This paper is not intended to provide comprehensive recommendations for overcoming the barriers to usage of the tuition and fee exemption. We do, however offer the following ideas as starting points for addressing the concerns identified in this paper.

### **A. Onerous Paperwork Requirements and Procedural Hurdles**

The SUS and Florida College System should create uniform requirements, procedures, and forms for implementation of tuition exemption. The process should be clear, simple, minimize repetition and eliminate unnecessary paperwork. It should not place any additional burden on students who use the exemption (e.g. delayed registration.) This can be achieved through rulemaking or sharing best practices.

### **B. Limitation on Credit Hours and Courses**

For purposes of ensuring that the greatest number of students have an opportunity to complete an undergraduate education without the payment of tuition or fees, the SUS and Florida College System could adopt administrative rules that:

1. Remove restrictions on the number of credit hours for which students can use the exemption. Alternatively, enlarge the number of hours to one that accommodates the needs of former foster youth.
2. Specify that remedial or other college preparatory classes do not count toward the maximum limit on credit hours.
3. Eliminate the limitations on the types of courses that are covered under the exemption (graduate classes, classes taken a third time).

Additionally, the statute as written does not limit the tuition exemption to an undergraduate degree. The SUS has imposed such a limitation in its rule. Advocates should seek a reexamination of this position.

### **C. Eligible Students Are Not Aware of the Exemption.**

There are a number of steps that schools and the State can take to ensure that all eligible students know about the tuition and fee exemption.

1. Use the school website to inform students about the tuition and fee exemption. See e.g. Tallahassee Community College and St. Petersburg College.

2. Place information about the on the tuition and fee exemption on the Florida DOE financial aid website.

3. Develop a process for Financial Aid offices to flag and follow up with applicants who may be eligible – at a minimum, applicants whose FAFSA form has the answer “yes” to either question 52 or 54 (or their equivalent in the future).<sup>17</sup> **A yes answer should trigger an individual inquiry to determine whether the student is eligible for the tuition exemption.**

#### **D. Lack of Eligibility**

1. Students who were placed with “non-relatives.” This category of youth can be addressed with a rule or other official interpretation that defines, “in the custody of the DCF” to include children who are in state care and placed in a non-relative placement. Alternatively, the statute could be changed to include youth in those placements.

2. Students placed with relatives, but not in the “Relative Caregiver Program.” This requires a statutory change.

3. Students Placed into Guardianship. A rule interpretation that broadens the definition of the “in the custody of DCF” would permit students who were placed with relatives or non-relatives prior to guardianship to become eligible for the exemption. Those students, and others placed into guardianship prior to age 16 could also be added with a statutory change.

4. Students Adopted prior to May 5, 1997. This requires a statutory change.

5. Students Reunified Prior to age 18. This requires a statutory change.

#### **Conclusion**

Florida is to be commended for its serious and sustained effort to assist former foster youth in completing higher education. This paper demonstrates, however, that we can do better. We can build on the strong foundation to make higher education a reality for more former foster youth.

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<sup>17</sup> Beginning in 2009-10, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (required of all students seeking financial aid), included questions to clarify the student’s status as a dependent. The current questions are:

52. At any time since you turned age 13, were both your parents deceased, were you in foster care or were you a dependent or ward of the court?

54. As determined by a court in your state of legal residence, are you or were you in legal guardianship?

## Appendix A

### **Composite of Statutes & Rules**

Footnote 4:

#### **1988 Fla. Stat §240.235(5) Fees.--**

(a) Any student for whom the state is paying a foster care board payment pursuant to s. 409.145(3) or parts III and V of chapter 39, for whom the permanency planning goal pursuant to part V of chapter 39 is long-term foster care or independent living shall be exempt from the payment of all undergraduate fees, including fees associated with enrollment in college-preparatory instruction or completion of college-level communication and computation skills testing programs. Before a fee exemption can be given, the student shall have applied for and been denied financial aid, pursuant to s. 240.404, which would have provided, at a minimum, payment of all undergraduate fees.

(b) Any student qualifying for a fee exemption under this subsection shall receive such an exemption for not more than 4 consecutive years or eight semesters unless the student is participating in college-preparatory instruction or is requiring additional time to complete the college-level communication and computation skills testing programs. Such a student shall be eligible to receive a fee exemption for a maximum of 5 consecutive years or 10 semesters.

(c) As a condition for continued fee exemption, a student shall have earned a grade point average of at least 2.0 on a 4.0 scale for the previous term, maintain at least an overall 2.0 average for college work, or have an average below 2.0 for only the previous term and be eligible for continued enrollment in the institution.

Footnote 5:

#### **Fla. Stat. §1001.706(2):**

(a) Pursuant to s. 7, Art. IX of the State Constitution, the board of governors has the authority to regulate the State University System and may adopt a regulation development procedure for the board of governors and the university boards of trustees to use in implementing their constitutional duties and responsibilities.

Footnote 6:

#### **7.008 Waiver of Tuition and Fees**

(6) Florida Department of Children and Family Service Adoptions - Each university board of trustees shall waive tuition and associated fees for any student who is or was at the time he or she reached the age of 18 in the custody of the Department of Children and Family Services or a relative under s. 39.5085; who was adopted from the Department of Children and Family Services after May 5, 1997; or was placed in a guardianship by a court after spending at least 6 months in the custody of the Department after reaching 16 years of age. Additionally, material and supply fees and fees associated with enrollment in career-preparatory instruction shall be waived. Any student requesting such a waiver must provide certification of

eligibility from the Department of Children and Family Services to the university in which the student seeks to enroll. This waiver shall remain valid up until the time the student reaches the age of 28, and shall be limited to undergraduate degree programs, and shall not exceed 120 credit hours.

Available at:

[http://www.flbog.edu/documents\\_regulations/regulations/2013\\_11\\_21\\_7\\_008waiveroftuitionandfeewaiversFINAL.pdf](http://www.flbog.edu/documents_regulations/regulations/2013_11_21_7_008waiveroftuitionandfeewaiversFINAL.pdf)

Footnote 8:

**1001.02 General powers of State Board of Education.—**

(1) The State Board of Education is the chief implementing and coordinating body of public education in Florida except for the State University System, and it shall focus on high-level policy decisions. It has authority to adopt rules pursuant to ss. 120.536(1) and 120.54 to implement the provisions of law conferring duties upon it for the improvement of the state system of K-20 public education except for the State University System. Except as otherwise provided herein, it may, as it finds appropriate, delegate its general powers to the Commissioner of Education or the directors of the divisions of the department.

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(6) The State Board of Education shall prescribe minimum standards, definitions, and guidelines for Florida College System institutions that will ensure the quality of education, coordination among the Florida College System institutions and state universities, and efficient progress toward accomplishing the Florida College System institution mission. At a minimum, these rules must address:

- (e) Student admissions, conduct and discipline, nonclassroom activities, and fees.
- (f) Budgeting.
- (g) Business and financial matters.

Footnote 10:

**1001.64 Florida College System institution boards of trustees; powers and duties.—**

(4)(a) The board of trustees, after considering recommendations submitted by the Florida College System institution president, may adopt rules pursuant to ss. 120.536(1) and 120.54 to implement the provisions of law conferring duties upon it. These rules may supplement those prescribed by the State Board of Education if they will contribute to the more orderly and efficient operation of Florida College System institutions.

(b) Each board of trustees is specifically authorized to adopt rules, procedures, and policies, consistent with law and rules of the State Board of Education, related to its mission and responsibilities as set forth in s. 1004.65, its governance, personnel, budget and finance, administration, programs, curriculum and instruction, buildings and grounds, travel and purchasing, technology, students, contracts and grants, or college property.

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(44) Each board of trustees may adopt rules, procedures, and policies related to institutional governance, administration, and management in order to promote orderly and efficient operation, including, but not limited to, financial management, budget management, physical plant management, and property management.

Footnote 11:

Broward College Policy No. 6Hx2-5.11 Foster Care. After registering, a state foster care board student can apply to have all matriculation and tuition fees waived up to a maximum of 32 credit hours per academic year. The waiver is for 2 consecutive years or 4 semesters, but may be extended for 3 years of 6 semesters if a student is in college preparatory courses. The student must apply and be denied financial aid in order to be eligible for the waiver. The fee waiver includes special charges. All courses must be taken for credit and must be completed for credit.

Available at

<http://www.broward.edu/PolicyAndProcedure/PolicyAndProcedure/SupportingContent/Pro511.pdf>

## Appendix B

### **Summary of Information That Colleges & Universities Published on the Web in 2012 Regarding Tuition Exemption**

We had law students examine all of the websites for Florida's public colleges and universities in 2012. They were asked to ascertain whether the tuition exemption was mentioned on the website and whether the school had any policies or procedures regarding the exemption. Here's what we learned.

#### **Is the Tuition Exemption Mentioned on the Website?**

Universities: Nine of the eleven state universities made no mention of the tuition exemption on their websites. Florida Atlantic University provided the language of the statute on its financial aid page for Veterans. Only the **University of Central Florida** mentioned the tuition exemption on its website in a way that was intended to inform and assist former foster youth who want to attend school there.

Colleges: Twenty-three of the 28 colleges in the Florida College System made no effort to advise students about the tuition exemption on their website. The following schools made some mention: College of Central Florida, Florida State College at Jacksonville, Miami Dade College, St. Petersburg College, and Tallahassee Community College. **Tallahassee Community College** made a special effort to address former foster youth about the tuition exemption. As noted below, a few other schools had policies or procedures concerning the exemption which could be found on the web by students who search diligently.

#### **Does the School Have Policies or Procedures Regarding the Tuition Exemption?**

##### Universities:

Five universities had some policy or procedure that discusses the tuition exemption. Two referenced the current version of the statute:

Florida Atlantic University's discussion of the tuition exemption was incomplete, however in that it does not include youth who were placed with family members under the relative caregiver statute. Moreover, it required the submission of a letter on DCF letterhead, when in fact the issuance of eligibility letters would most likely come from the Community Based Care Lead Agency.

University of Central Florida appeared to require the submission of the eligibility letter each semester. It also limited eligibility for students whose letters of eligibility were drawn prior to July 1, 2010 to 4 years post high school or age 24.

Three schools had policies that cited to a previous version of the statute:

The University of Florida's registrar's policies cited the older version of the law that made the exemption available to students who get foster care board payments.

The University of South Florida similarly cited a previous version of the statute in its cash accounting policies. It also required students to submit a form each term.

The University of West Florida discussed eligibility relating to the receipt of foster care board payments, and noted the out-dated requirement that students apply for and be denied financial aid before obtaining the exemption.

Colleges:

Broward County College imposed a credit limitation on the use of the tuition exemption. It limited students to a maximum of 32 credit hours per year and two years or four semesters; or 3 years and six semesters if enrolled in college preparatory courses.

College of Central Florida appeared to require the exemption paperwork to be provided by a DCF staff person, rather than a CBC staff person.

Florida State College at Jacksonville provided general information and directs students to the Business Office for additional information.

Miami Dade College cited a previous version of the statute that did not include students placed into guardianship after age 16. Moreover, it limited the exemption to 4 years after high school graduation.

Santa Fe Community College had a generic policy that requires persons using fee waivers to register on the last day of registration. (It's not known whether they apply this policy to former foster youth using the tuition exemption.)

St. Petersburg College provided access to a form, but access is restricted to students so we could not review. We have been advised that the school has streamlined the process to facilitate registration for continuing students and may have a model process that other schools should consider.

**Conclusion**

At the time of our survey, only one college – Tallahassee Community College and one university, University of Central Florida made a concerted effort to notify students about the availability of the tuition exemption. Less than half (5 of the 11)

of the universities and only a quarter (7 of the 28 ) of the colleges had some information about the tuition exemption on their website. The majority of the schools that had some information – either had incorrect information concerning eligibility or impose limitations not required by law.

## Appendix C

### **Young Adults Eligible for Tuition Exemption (email excerpt)**

**From:** John Jackson <John\_Jackson@dcf.state.fl.us>

**Subject: Re: Tuition Exemption Public Records Request**

**Date:** July 2, 2012 10:43:00 AM EDT

**To:** Robin Rosenberg <robin.rosenberg@floridaschildrenfirst.org>

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The total count as of today is 12,969.

The breakouts are:

- a) aged out of licensed foster care: 11,204
- b) were discharged to guardianship at the age of 16 or older after having been in licensed care the immediate six months prior: 1,609
- c) were discharged to adoption at the age of 16 or older after having been in licensed care the immediate six months prior: 213<sup>1</sup>
- d) were in an approved relative placement when they turned 18 years of age: 1,151

John M. Jackson  
Assistant General Counsel  
Department of Children and Families

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<sup>1</sup> These 213 teens were deleted from the total used in the White Paper to avoid overlap with the data on all adopted children