

Keys to Independence

Passage of [CS/SB 744](#) is a priority of [Florida's Guardian ad Litem Program](#). Thousands of Guardian ad Litem staff and volunteers work daily to support and protect foster children. They recognize that providing access to driving is fundamentally important to helping normalize (to the extent possible) the lives of foster children; to allow them to have the same educational, social, and employment opportunities as their peers.

Life experiences gained through the mobility provided being able to drive are important because they are a part of how all children learn to be prepared for responsibilities they will assume as adults. Among many others, lack of transportation is one of the top reasons why people of all ages fail to attain and maintain employment and self sufficiency.

Not being able to drive hits foster youth particularly hard. At the end of January 2014, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) reported there were 385 15-year-olds, 458 16-year-olds, and 517 17-year-olds in foster care.

According to DCF:

- 1 percent of 16-year-olds (4 children of 300 surveyed) had driver's licenses;
- 4 percent of 17-year-olds (16 children of 387 surveyed) had driver's licenses; and
- 3 percent of the total number of children surveyed (20 of 687 surveyed) had driver's licenses.

[CS/SB 744](#) and its House companion [HB 977](#), among others:

- authorize courts to remove the disability of nonage for any minor obtaining motor vehicle insurance if the youth has reached 16 years of age, has been adjudicated dependent, is residing in an out-of-home placement, and has completed a driver education program. In order to execute the documents necessary for insurance, the youth must present a court order removing the disability of nonage for this purpose;
- require high schools offering driver's education courses to grant preferential enrollment to students in the custody of the DCF if the students maintain appropriate progress as required by the school;
- direct DCF to establish a 3-year pilot program to pay the costs of driver education, licensure, and other costs incidental to licensure and motor vehicle insurance for children in licensed out-of-home care who have successfully completed a driver education program, to the extent funding is available; and
- direct DCF to contract with a not-for-profit entity whose mission is to support youth aging out of foster care to develop procedures for operating and administering the pilot program.