

AMERICAN CHILDREN'S CAMPAIGN

2022 Bill Highlights

As of 4/4/2022

SB 7034 - Child Welfare

Sponsors: Senate Children, Families, and Elder Affairs

Outcome: SB 7034 is enrolled.

Target Population: Caregivers of children in out-of-home care

Summary: Increases monthly payments for relative or nonrelative caregivers with a level I foster placement and caregivers with a child who has been found dependent, regardless of level I licensure. Caregivers without a level I license 6 months after placement will receive payment determined by department rule, which must be less than the amount provided to a participant in the Guardian Assistance Program. Relatives participating in this payment may still obtain special benefit payment. Increases monthly room and board rates to \$517.94 (0-5 years), \$531.21 (6-12 years), and \$621.77 (13-21 years). Provides an annual cost of living increase for relative and nonrelative caregivers with a level I license



or who are participating in the Relative Caregiver Program. Provides a \$200 a month child care subsidy to any foster parents and relative or nonrelative caregivers who have a child between birth and school entry age. Exempts students from tuition and fees until they are 28 if they were the subject of a shelter, dependency, or termination of parental rights proceeding and were in out-of-home care by their 18th birthday OR were reunited with their parents after they turned 14 after spending at least 18 months in out-of-home care and are eligible for a Pell Grant OR were adopted from the Department OR were placed in permanent guardianship.

Impact: In 2021, the Florida Legislature created a list of priority placement options for children in the child welfare system, which establishes relative caregivers as the second best placement option after a non-offending parent, with nonrelative caregivers at number five, above a licensed foster care home or group care. More than 31% of all children in the custody of DCF are placed with extended family members, which equates to approximately 231,000 children in Florida.

In current law, if a child has not been found dependent, a relative caregiver is only eligible for temporary financial assistance if they have a close enough kinship to the child, while nonrelative caregivers receive no monthly benefit assistance at all. Increasing subsidies for relative and nonrelative caregivers will incentivize more stable and long-term placements for children in out-of-home care and increase the probability of adoption before children age out of care.

SB 7034 would also provide a \$200 monthly child care subsidy to all foster parents and relative or nonrelative caregivers with children ages 0 to school entry age. Florida law requires children in out of home care to enroll in child care in order to ensure many people have eyes on them to keep them safe. The cost is often a burden on foster parents even though participation in child care is required by law. In 2020, the average cost of center-based infant care in



Florida was approximately \$9,312 every year which equates to \$776 per month.

The ability of relative and nonrelative caregivers and foster parents to pay for high quality child care will improve early childhood development and school readiness, promote family self-sufficiency by allowing for parental employment, narrow socioeconomic and racial disparities, and remove a financial barrier that may keep eligible adults from becoming foster parents or relative caregivers.

Caregivers to children in out-of-home care serve a vital role in ensuring positive development, despite challenges associated with experiencing crisis. Maintaining a safe, supportive environment and providing for the emotional and physical needs of a child who has experienced trauma are crucial and inadequate resources make this job even more difficult. American Children's Campaign supports any effort to lessen the financial burden felt by foster parents as they provide relief to children experiencing crisis.

Effective Date: July 1st, 2022

