

MINUTES  
**SENATE HEALTH & WELFARE COMMITTEE**

**DATE:** Tuesday, March 04, 2025

**TIME:** 3:00 P.M.

**PLACE:** Room WW54

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chairman VanOrden, Vice Chairman Bjerke, Senators Harris, Zuiderveld, Lenney, Shippy, Blaylock, Keyser, and Wintrow

**ABSENT/ EXCUSED:** None

**NOTE:** The sign-in sheet, testimonies and other related materials will be retained with the minutes in the committee's office until the end of the session and will then be located on file with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.

**CONVENED:** **Chair VanOrden** called to order the meeting of the Senate Health and Welfare Committee at 3:02 p.m.

**MINUTES APPROVAL:** **Senator Keyser** moved to approve the Minutes of January 18, 2025. **Senator Lenney** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

**MINUTES APPROVAL:** **Senator Shippy** moved to approve the Minutes of January 24, 2025. **Senator Bjerke** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

**H 220** **BEHAVIORAL HEALTH - Amends, repeals, and adds to existing law to revise provisions regarding behavioral health services.** **Jared Larsen**, Legislative and Regulatory Affairs Chief, Department of Health and Welfare (DHW), stated this bill addressed fee schedules resulting from the 2024 contract with Magellan. It retained a 5% cap on income and ensured that no one would be denied services due to an inability to pay.

**MOTION:** **Senator Blaylock** moved to send **H 220** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Harris** seconded the motion.

**DISCUSSION:** **Senator Blaylock** noted she had recently been appointed to the Behavioral Health Council and approving this bill felt appropriate. **Mr. Larsen** welcomed Senator Blaylock to the council and was happy to accept her motion.

**Senator Wintrow** noted a 5% cap would work better than a sliding scale and supported this bill knowing it would not cut services.

**VOICE VOTE:** The motion carried on **voice vote**.

**H 245** **FOSTER CARE - Amends existing law to revise provisions regarding extended and continued care and to revise provisions regarding relative foster care.** **Vice Chair Bjerke** stated this bill followed DHW's emphasis on child welfare by extending the foster care cutoff age from 21 years old to 23 years old. This intended to reduce food insecurity, homelessness, and arrest of former foster youth, and increase post-secondary school enrollment by providing a stronger support system. **Vice Chair Bjerke** noted this was a potential fiscal benefit as foster care costed \$16 per day whereas correctional facilities costed \$80 per day. He hoped this bill kept foster children out of the correctional system and in the community.

**DISCUSSION:** **Chair VanOrden** asked if participating in the foster care extension was voluntary. **Senator Bjerke** responded an individual could still opt out of foster care at 18 or 21 years old. This bill pushed the final exit age to 23 years old.

**Senator Wintrow** asked for an overview of emerging adults in foster care and what benefits DHW anticipated from extending the age. **Monty Prow**, Deputy Director, DHW Child Welfare, stated youth who entered the foster system as late teens often did not learn basic skills such as applying for a job or balancing checks. This created adults with the development and life skills of a teenager which increased the risk of severe homelessness and addiction. The program proposed in **H 245** increased time for young adults to learn practical skills and thus avoid long-term societal costs.

**Senator Lenney** asked whether other states had adopted similar ages for a foster care extension. **Deputy Director Prow** stated all states had a version of extended care and eight states had a final cutoff age of 23 years old: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, West Virginia, California, Connecticut, and New Hampshire.

**Senator Shippy** wondered whether extending the cutoff age to 23 years old meant the Legislature should reevaluate other age-related rights such as voting or gun purchasing. **Deputy Director Prow** noted social science demonstrated that youth entering the foster care system as a late teenager faced maturity delays. This bill addressed that reality to aid foster youth in gaining life skills.

**Senator Wintrow** clarified that this bill did not attempt to push back adulthood, but instead balanced out challenges during childhood to better prepare foster youth for adulthood, thus decreasing the risk of failure. **Deputy Director Prow** concurred.

**TESTIMONY:** **Ivy Smith**, Idaho Voices for Children, discussed her personal experience overcoming the challenges of aging out of the foster care system. She noted that despite hard work, she faced multiple barriers to attend college, including a six hour court hearing, and relied heavily on the support of the foster care system. **Ms. Smith** urged the Committee to pass **H 245** as it provided crucial support to youth transitioning to adulthood and ensured they had the resources to succeed.

**DISCUSSION:** **Senator Lenney** inquired if there was data on states who implemented foster care extensions. **Ms. Smith** stated that a study by Chapin Hall found that foster care extensions reduced homelessness by 30%, pregnancy by age 21 reduced by 28%, the odds of being arrested reduced by 41%, and the odds of being convicted of a crime reduced by 40%. Additionally, **Ms. Smith** noted that the likelihood of completing a year of college increased by 350%.

**TESTIMONY:** **Sarah Bettwiser**, former foster youth representing Family Advocates, noted the importance of having support when transitioning to adulthood. **Ms. Bettwiser** noted that many young adults lived with their parents while attending school or entering the workforce, and saw this program as an extension of that network.

**Shane Hansen**, CEO and Founder of Freedom Youth Foundation, discussed the various life skills foster children must be taught before they can enter the workforce such as finances, renting, and employment training. He felt an additional two year investment gave foster children the time and opportunity to succeed.

**Marissa Franklin**, former foster child, explained the fear foster children experience of aging out. She noted that extending care to age 23 would provide more time to heal from childhood trauma and build a stable future.

**Norm Varin**, former foster parent, discussed the unique challenges his daughter

faced in transitioning to adulthood. Though a fiscal conservative, he felt that extending care was worth the financial cost.

**DISCUSSION:** **Senator Wintrow** noted that the Committee meetings were held in an environment removed from the trauma facing foster children and confirmed that Mr. Varin believed the program was worth the monetary impact. **Mr. Varin** concurred, stating his daughter was not in a position at age 21 to function as an adult. She needed a couple extra years of support to overcome childhood difficulties.

**Senator Bjerke** thanked the testifiers and Deputy Director Prow for their insight and experiences.

**MOTION:** **Senator Harris** moved to send **H 245** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Wintrow** seconded the motion.

**DISCUSSION:** **Senator Lenney** noted his original hesitancy to approve the bill as he viewed foster care as a short-term crutch. He stated the testimony convinced him of its importance and requested that the Legislature revisit the program in a few years to assess impact.

**Senator Blaylock** concurred that she arrived to the meeting unsure of her vote, but felt comfortable supporting the motion due to the testimonies and DHW backing. **Senator Blaylock** stated she reserved her right to change her vote on the floor.

**Senator Shippy** appreciated the testifiers, but wondered if innate resilience was a stronger predictor of success than two additional years of foster care support. He felt the bill did not address underlying issues of delayed maturity since the youth still had adult rights such as voting and purchasing firearms.

**Senator VanOrden** shared her experience living with a young son with drug addiction. She noted that her 23 year old acted similar to a teenager and was still learning to navigate life. **Chair VanOrden** stated that if the foster age extension protected youth, she was willing to fund two additional years of care.

**VOICE VOTE:** The motion carried on a **voice vote**. **Senator Shippy** and **Senator Zuiderveld** requested to be recorded as voting nay.

**ADJOURNED:** There being no further business at this time, **Chair VanOrden** adjourned the meeting at 3:55 p.m.

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Senator VanOrden  
Chair

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Rebecca Kozlowski  
Secretary