



VERMONT LEGISLATIVE
Joint Fiscal Office

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Fiscal Note

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H.657 – An act relating to enabling unaccompanied homeless youth to obtain certain services without parental consent

As recommended by the House Committee on Human Services Draft 8.1¹

Bill Summary

The bill proposes to enable an unaccompanied homeless youth to obtain a certification from the Department for Children and Families (DCF) that would allow them to obtain certain services and care without consent of a parent or guardian.

Section 1 – Elimination of Asset Limits for Reach Up Eligibility

Sec. 1 would eliminate the asset limits for families for the purposes of determining initial and continuing eligibility for the Reach Up program. Currently, the asset limit is \$9,000.² According to DCF, the fiscal impact is difficult to determine as eliminating the asset limit could potentially expand the program by qualifying an unknown number of individuals for the program. In fiscal year 2025, there were a total of 18 cases where people were denied because their incomes were over the resource limit. The average cost per case per month is \$646. Using fiscal year 2025 as a proxy, based on the 18 cases that were denied, the fiscal impact of removing asset limits could be as much as \$140,000 in fiscal year 2027.

Sections 3 – Social Security Benefits for Youth in Foster Care

Sec. 3 would prohibit DCF from using any portion of a child's Social Security benefits to offset the State's costs for the child's maintenance except to maintain the child's eligibility for Supplemental Social Security Income (SSI) benefits and to avoid a violation of federal asset or resource limits. Currently, DCF uses this money to cover the cost of care for youth in custody. Since this section would not take effect until July 1, 2027, it would not impact the fiscal year 2027 budget. However, it would have an approximately \$700,000 impact in fiscal year 2028.

According to DCF, they would also need an additional full-time equivalent (FTE) position to implement the requirement that DCF appeal any denied applications for SSI benefits submitted on behalf of the child. The annualized cost of an FTE at paygrade 24, including fringe benefits, would be approximately \$124,000 annualized. This section would take effect July 1, 2027. The fiscal year 2028 cost for the position will

¹ *The Joint Fiscal Office (JFO) is a nonpartisan legislative office dedicated to producing unbiased fiscal analysis – this fiscal note is meant to provide information for legislative consideration, not to provide policy recommendations. The full fiscal note history is available on the fiscal tab of the bill page on the General Assembly website and can be pulled up through a bill number search on the JFO page.*

² 33 V.S.A. § 1103

depend on if and/or when an FTE is hired.

Sections 7 and 8 – Motor Vehicle and Motorcycle License and Learner’s Permit Fees

Sec. 7 would exempt an unaccompanied youth from having to pay driver’s or motorcycle license fees. Sec. 8 would exempt an unaccompanied youth from having to pay a fee for a learner’s permit. The fiscal impact of these fee exemptions is expected to be de minimis.

Section 14 – Children in Correctional Facilities Work Group

Sec. 14 would require DCF and the Department of Corrections (DOC) to submit a written report to the committees of jurisdiction regarding the use of restraints and seclusion on minors detained in DOC facilities and potential means for reducing physical and psychological trauma from restraint and seclusion. In preparing this report, the departments shall consult with a work group composed of specified groups and stakeholders, who if not participating in their professional State capacities, would be entitled to per diems and expense reimbursement as permitted under 32 V.S.A. § 1010 for not more than five meetings. These costs would be absorbed by the Office of Child, Youth, and Family Advocate. Given the small number of meetings and the assumption that most of the participants would be working in their professional capacities, the fiscal impact is expected to be de minimis.

Section 16 – Prenatal Engagement and Family Support Working Group

Sec. 16 would create the Prenatal Engagement and Family Support Working Group to examine DCF’s current practice of using a pregnancy calendar to monitor and track certain pregnant individuals in Vermont and provide recommendations on alternatives to a pregnancy calendar and ways to support pregnant individuals in need of services. Members who are not participating in their professional State capacities or who would not otherwise be compensated for attendance at meetings would be entitled to per diem compensation and reimbursement of expenses as permitted under 32 V.S.A. § 1010 for not more than five meetings. These costs would be absorbed by DCF. Given the small number of meetings and the assumption that most of the participants would be working in their professional capacities, the fiscal impact is expected to be de minimis.

Fiscal Summary

Effective Fiscal Year 2027

Sec.	Description	Fiscal Impact
1	Elimination of asset limits for Reach Up eligibility	\$140,000
7 & 8	Motor vehicle and motorcycle licence and learner's permit fees	-----
14	Children in correctional facilities work group (per diems and reimbursements)	-----
16	Prenatal engagement and family support working group (per diems and reimbursements)	-----

Effective Fiscal Year 2028

Sec.	Description	Fiscal Impact
3	Social Security benefits for youth in foster care	\$700,000
	FTE (Paygrade 24), salary and benefits	TBD

Other Considerations

There could be additional administrative costs associated with the bill not already identified.