

Report on North Carolina Driver's License Pilot Project

Session Law 2017-41, Section 6.1.(b)



Report to the

**Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on
Health and Human Services**

By

**North Carolina Department of Health and Human
Services**

March 1, 2018

Introduction

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) submits this report to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services pursuant to North Carolina Session Law 2017-41, Part VI. Driver's License Pilot Project, Section 6.1.(b).

PART VI. DRIVERS LICENSE PILOT PROJECT

SECTION 6.1.(a) The General Assembly recognizes that not having a drivers license is a barrier to education, employment, health care, and other community-based activities for older youth in foster care, as defined in G.S. 131D-10.2(9), working toward independence. One of the biggest barriers to accessing a drivers license for such youth is the ability to obtain insurance. Therefore, to assist in this effort, the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Social Services, shall establish a two-year pilot program that shall reimburse, on a first-come, first-served basis, youth and caregivers' costs associated with drivers license education, drivers license fees, insurance costs, and any other costs associated with obtaining a drivers license. The Division shall take appropriate steps to ensure proper advertising of the pilot program.

SECTION 6.1.(b) The Division of Social Services shall report on the pilot project to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services by March 1, 2018.

SECTION 6.2. This part becomes effective July 1, 2017.

This report provides a status of the 2017 Driver's License Pilot Project, Transportation Really Is Possible (TRIP) and its implementation.

Background Information

In December of 1999, the United States Congress enacted Public Law 106-69, the John Chafee Foster Care Independence Act. North Carolina's Chafee program is known as LINKS. LINKS is not an acronym, rather it is a word that captures the purposes of the Chafee Act and the intent of North Carolina to build a network of relevant services with youth to promote ongoing connections with family, friends, mentors, the community, employers, education, financial assistance, skills training, and other resources to facilitate their transition to adulthood.

The funding provided by the General Assembly for the driver's license pilot project established in Session Law 2017-41 will provide additional support to ensure that youth in foster care can obtain their learner's permits and driver's licenses. For many young people in foster care, not having a license to drive is a barrier to accessing education, healthcare, and community activities. For these youth, driving is not merely a privilege, but a route to independence. Presently, LINKS funding can be used to support eligible youth in obtaining a learner's permit or driver's license, vehicles, and insurance.

Development of Driver's License Program Criteria

The following explains the process the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Social Services completed to develop the program criteria.

1. Developed and administered survey to collect data on youth of driving age:

On August 15th, the Division released a Dear County Director letter to request child welfare agency input in a survey to collect data on; (1) how counties are funding driver's education, driver's license fees, and insurance for young people, (2) barriers to driving faced by young people currently or formerly in foster care; and (3) any additional information the counties could provide on opportunities and barriers to youth in foster care obtaining their learner's permits or driver's licenses. Sixty-five individuals representing 55 county departments of social services completed the survey.

Supporting Youth Drivers

Survey respondents were asked what funds are used for youth to attend driver's education courses, and pay learner's permit and driver's license fees. Results indicate that counties primarily use LINKS Transitional Funds to cover the cost of driver's education, driver's license, and learner's permits. See chart in Appendix A for more information on funding sources county departments of social services use to cover driver's education, driver's licenses, and learner's permits.

Survey respondents were asked what funds are used to assist youth in obtaining vehicle insurance. Results indicate that counties primarily use LINKS Transitional Funds to cover the cost of insurance for youth. See chart in Appendix B for more information on funding sources county departments of social services use to cover vehicle insurance for youth.

Access to Vehicles

Survey respondents were asked whether youth are driving their own vehicles or vehicles belonging to someone else. Results indicate that youth are, more often, driving vehicles that belong to someone else.

Barriers – Financial and Non-Financial

Survey respondents were asked to rank a list of potential barriers. The most common barriers identified by respondents, in order, were:

- Securing car insurance
- Placement provider's willingness to assist young people in getting insurance and gaining driving experience
- Insufficient funding to cover costs

Survey respondents were also provided an opportunity to list any other barriers youth in foster care encounter when attempting to obtain a learner's permit, driver's license, driving experience, or car insurance. Other barriers provided by the respondent counties included, but were not limited to, the following:

- Changes in placement/placement stability;
- Placement type – young people in group care/therapeutic care
- Barriers to test-taking
- No access to vehicle to use
- Cognitive, mental/behavioral health needs, or physical limitations
- Foster parent/caregiver unwilling to let youth driver their vehicles, concerned about liability
- Young people maintaining employment to afford car insurance and ongoing costs associated with having a vehicle
- Access to a vehicle for driving test at DMV
- No credit / down payment to purchase a vehicle and person to co-sign a loan
- Grades too low/school suspension
- Foster parents resistant to allowing youth to work to pay their portion of expenses for vehicle and insurance
- Difficulties in moving the insurance with the youth if placement changes

2. Recruitment of county child welfare agency staff, youth, and other stakeholders to participate in the development of program criteria:

Representatives from county child welfare agencies and other stakeholders were recruited to participate in the development of program criteria and discussion of ways to address barriers youth in foster care encounter when they prepare to obtain their learner's permit or driver's license.

Participants in Stakeholder Group

- North Carolina Division of Social Services (2 individuals)
- County Departments of Social Services (4 individuals, 4 counties represented)
- Strong Able Youth Speaking Out (SaySo) staff and youth (4 individuals)
- North Carolina State University Center for Family and Community Engagement (2 individuals)
- Caregiver / Family Partner (1 individual)

3. Held teleconference meetings to discuss and develop the eligibility criteria of young people, caregivers, and costs to be covered.

Seven (7) conference calls were held between September 11th and November 6th, 2017 to:

- Develop the eligibility criteria of youth and caregivers;
- Create forms and tools for county staff to use to assess driving readiness of youth,

submission of reimbursement requests to the State, and to establish agreements between the county agency, the young person, and the caregiver;

- Determine costs that would be covered by the program;
- Discuss ways to encourage caregivers to support young people in obtaining their permits and licenses, and to gain driving experience;
- Identify strategies for promoting the program among youth

4. Approved and released criteria and forms created by the stakeholder group.

Following finalization of criteria and forms, a Dear County Director letter, along with required documents, was sent on December 7th, 2017 announcing the start of the program.

Final Criteria

Below is a snapshot of several of the components of the final criteria. The full criteria can be accessed at: <https://www2.ncdhhs.gov/info/olm/manuals/dss/csm-10/man>.

Eligibility of Youth and Caregivers

Youth / Young Adult Eligibility Criteria

Young people are eligible for assistance through TRIP if they:

- Meet one of the following criteria:
 - Are at least 14 ½ years of age, but less than 18 years of age and are in foster care as identified in G.S. 131D-10.2(9); or
 - Were in foster care upon their 18th birthday and have entered into a Voluntary Placement Agreement with a county to participate in Foster Care 18 to 21;
- And meet all of the criteria below:
 - Have obtained approval of their caregiver in accordance with the reasonable and prudent parent standard OR from the county child welfare agency, as needed;
 - Have contacted the county child welfare agency, as needed, to obtain any other approval or information needed to attend driver's education courses, obtain a learner's permit or driver's license and consulted with the county and their caregiver regarding their readiness to drive;
 - Have one or more goals on their DSS-5096A Transitional Living Plan

which specify the steps they must take to meet the criteria for which they are seeking support (i.e. enroll in and complete driver's education); and,

- Have a written agreement with their caregiver and county child welfare agency that includes, at a minimum, the following:
 - Their plan to contribute toward ongoing costs associated with driving that are not or will not be covered by TRIP or LINKS;
 - Any educational criteria needed, such as budgeting, understanding insurance, etc.; and,
 - Caregiver's agreement to support the young person in obtaining driving experience.

Caregiver Eligibility Criteria

Caregivers are eligible for reimbursement under TRIP for costs incurred in association with assisting youth in their care with obtaining a learner's permit or driver's license if they:

- Meet one of the following criteria:
 - Are providing care for a youth in foster care as defined in G.S. 131D-10.2(9), who is at least 14 ½ years of age, but less than 18 years of age; or,
 - Are providing placement to a young adult 18-years-of-age or older, but less than 21 years-of-age, who has entered into a Voluntary Placement Agreement with a county to participate in Foster Care 18 to 21;
- And meet all of the criteria below:
 - Have applied the reasonable and prudent parent standard, as appropriate, in the decision-making process related to any approval the young person would need from the caregiver to attend driver's education courses or obtain a learner's permit or driver's license;
 - Have contacted the county child welfare agency, as needed to obtain any other approval or information needed for the young person to attend driver's education courses, obtain a learner's permit or driver's license and consulted with the county and the young person regarding the young person's readiness to drive; and,

- Have a written agreement with the young person and the county child welfare agency that includes, at a minimum, the following:
 - Young person's plan to contribute toward ongoing costs associated with driving that are not or will not be covered by TRIP or LINKS
 - Any educational criteria the young person must meet, such as budgeting, understanding insurance, etc.; and,
 - Caregiver's agreement to support the young person in gaining driving experience.

Assessing Readiness

In addition to meeting the eligibility criteria, thoughtful planning between the county child welfare agency, the young person, and their caregiver to ensure the young person is prepared to assume the responsibility of driving is key to addressing this barrier to independence.

TRIP criteria instructs county child welfare agencies to assess the readiness of youth under the age of 18 with the youth and their caregivers. The tool available to county child welfare agencies to assess readiness of youth to drive is the TRIP Readiness Assessment. The assessment facilitates a discussion about safety issues related to medical, mental health, or emotional conditions, substance use, and other areas that may impact a young person's judgement and safety behind the wheel. This assessment tool is used to facilitate a conversation about a young person's readiness to drive and jointly plan to address barriers to a young person's readiness. County child welfare agencies are instructed not to use the assessment to create or contribute to barriers to driving.

Eligible Costs

The following costs are eligible for reimbursement under the TRIP program.

- Driver's Education Courses (Offered through Public High Schools or Private Driving Schools)
- Learner's Permit and Driver's License Fees in accordance with the Department of Motor Vehicles schedule of fees
- Vehicle Insurance

Reimbursement may be provided to eligible youth, young adults, and caregivers up to \$1,000. This is a one-time cost and may not be provided to the same young person in both years of the two-year pilot program. Young people who receive assistance with insurance costs through TRIP are also eligible for three months or up to \$650 for

insurance costs through LINKS Special Funds. County departments of social services must first apply the LINKS Special Funds to a young person's insurance costs. Once a young person has received assistance with insurance through LINKS for three months or up to \$650, counties may then provide additional support through TRIP.

This applies to young people who obtain their own vehicle insurance policy for their own vehicle, obtain non-owner's insurance for the operation of a caregiver or other person's vehicle, or caregivers who have added young people to their policies.

- Other Associated Costs

The stakeholder group determined that "other costs associated" with young people obtaining their permits, licenses, and learning to drive include the following:

- Vehicle Inspection Fees

Reimbursement may be provided for vehicle inspection fees for young people acquiring their own vehicles. The cost of the required safety inspection may be reimbursed within the first year of the young person obtaining, owning, and maintaining the vehicle.

- Registration Fees

Reimbursement may be provided for registration fees up to the cost of registration if a young person is acquiring their own vehicle. These costs may be reimbursed within the first year of the young person obtaining, owning, and maintaining the vehicle.

- Taxes

Reimbursement may be provided for vehicle property taxes up to the cost if a young person is acquiring their own vehicle. This cost can be reimbursed within the first year of the young person obtaining, owning, and maintaining the vehicle.

- Additional Fees

For young people who may not have access to a vehicle for taking the driver's test at a local DMV, fees associated with paying a private driving school for access to a vehicle for this test may be reimbursed.

- Incentives for Caregivers

Caregivers may be provided an incentive from \$75 up to \$100 for allowing a young person to use their vehicle for the driver's test to obtain their learner's permit or driver's license. TRIP will not cover costs associated with any

damages to the vehicle caused by the young person during the driver's test.

- Vehicle History Reports

For young people obtaining vehicles, TRIP may reimburse for the cost of the vehicle history reports (Carfax, AutoCheck, etc.) up to \$100. Reimbursement for this cost may be provided when such a report is not provided or dealership selling the vehicle.

Reimbursement Process

Until funding is exhausted, funds are available to all youth who meet the criteria. Funding is not capped per county. To request reimbursement through TRIP, a young person or caregiver must incur eligible driving-related costs, as outlined in the TRIP Program Criteria and submit the required documentation to the county child welfare agency to request reimbursement. Counties will provide reimbursement to the eligible young person or caregiver for eligible costs and then submit a request for reimbursement to the Division of Social Services. Reimbursement is provided based upon availability of funds.

Young people and caregivers must submit:

- Receipts of eligible costs incurred
- Documentation of driver's education enrollment / documentation of course completion

After the county child welfare agency, has provided reimbursement to the young person or caregiver, the county must submit a request for reimbursement along with supporting documentation directly to the State using the TRIP Request for Reimbursement form. When a county child welfare agency submits a TRIP Request for Reimbursement, the agency must also provide the following supporting documentation submitted by the youth or caregiver:

- Receipts for eligible costs incurred
- Documentation of driver's education enrollment or course completion.

The Division then reviews, approves, and submits reimbursement requests to the Controller's Office by the 15th of every month to be paid through Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT) to counties.

Expenditures To-Date and Tracking Outcomes

Beginning January 1, 2018 county child welfare agencies could submit reimbursement requests to the Division of Social Services for TRIP-eligible costs reimbursed to young people and caregivers by the county in the month of December 2017. As of January 16th, no reimbursement requests for TRIP-eligible costs have been received by the Division. Counties usually submit

reimbursement requests after the end of the month.

The Division will track program outcomes monthly throughout the course of the pilot project, as follows:

- Number of youth served by TRIP
- Number of youth licenses obtained
- Type and total expenses by county
- Type and total expenses across the state

Communication Plan

The Division will continue to communicate information about TRIP on a regular basis through:

- Monthly County DSS Director meetings and webinars.
- Monthly DSS Children's Services Committee Meetings.
- Monthly Web Conferences and monthly emails to county DSS LINKS Coordinators.
- Monthly communication with SaySo.
- Monthly communication with the Guardian ad Litem (GAL) program.
- Monthly communication with County Child Welfare Managers and Budget Officers
- Monthly communication with the Department of Public Instruction
- Monthly communication with Local Education Agencies

Engaging county directors, county staff, and partners such as SaySo and the GAL program will provide more opportunities to reach out to youth and young adults. In addition, continuously providing information will help to ensure counties and partner agencies identify eligible youth and provide them with assistance, thus spending program funds. Keeping the lines of communication open, identifying and serving eligible young people will deliver a larger impact as the program provides young people support in obtaining learner's permits, driver's licenses, insurance, and driving experience to further their independent living goals.

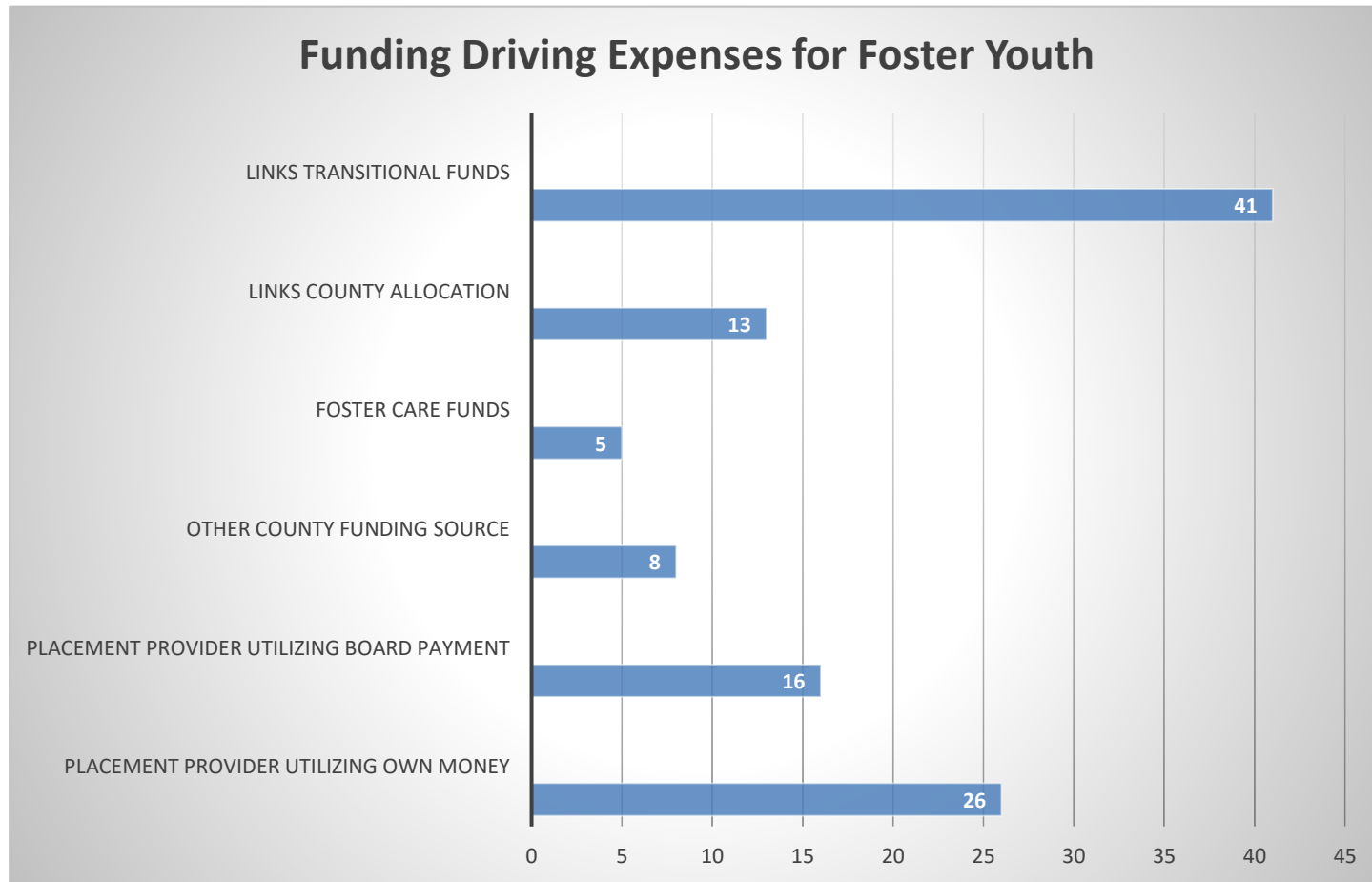
Conclusion

Not having a driver's license is a barrier to education, employment, health care, and community engagement for many youths in foster care. The Transportation Really Is Possible (TRIP) pilot program, together with LINKS, can assist youth and young adults in foster care in overcoming barriers to obtaining driver's licenses and learner's permits to help support youth independence. The Division, and partner agencies such as Strong Able Youth Speaking Out (SaySo), will continue to reach out to county departments of social services for the duration of the TRIP pilot to provide training and information on the program, as well as support counties in promoting the

program among youth.

Appendix A

Survey respondents were asked what funds are used for youth to attend driver's education courses, and pay learner's permit and driver's license fees. The chart below shows the answers selected by the 56 respondents who answered this question.



Appendix B

Survey respondents were asked what funds are used to assist youth in obtaining vehicle insurance. The chart below shows the answers selected by the 53 respondents who answered this question.

