



Driver Education Program Funding Allotment to Texas Workforce Commission Senate Finance Hearing Testimony

February 12, 2025

Dear Chair Huffman and the Finance Committee,

Youth experiencing homelessness and/or in foster care face unique challenges that make it hard for them to attain economic and housing stability. One of these considerations is transportation. Living in a car-centric state like Texas, having access to a car is critical for getting to work, school, and other responsibilities. However, getting a driver's license for a young person experiencing homelessness can be a difficult process to navigate. Thankfully, the Legislature recognized the difficulties homeless youth and youth in foster care face in getting critical documents and a driver's license, and we worked with legislators to pass key legislation to remove some of the financial barriers these youth have to overcome.

In 2019, House Bill 123 created a fund where Texans who are renewing their driver's licenses can donate to support youth experiencing homelessness and ensure they can get identification documents including driver's licenses free of charge. Because of the generosity of Texans across the state, this fund grew and the Legislature realized it could help homeless youth and youth in foster care even further. In 2021, we worked with legislators to pass Senate Bill 2054, which expanded the use of this fund to finance a Driver Education Funding (DEF) program operated by the Texas Workforce Commission. The DEF program covers the cost of a driver education course, but also costs associated with in-car lessons, road tests, and other fees needed to get a driver's license.

Although the fund has had great success, several technical and operational issues have impacted this program's ability to help youth. The most pressing one we wanted to highlight today is the TWC's inability to access more than \$280,453 to operate and administer the program when, as of August 2024, the fund has just over \$4 million dollars. A rider passed in the supplemental budget during the previous legislative session which allowed DPS to transfer funds to TWC is being interpreted by the agency as a cap that prevents them from adequately funding this program. **This cap contradicts the intent of the original bill, which allows TWC to request a transfer of funds that does not exceed three times the amount expended in the previous**

fiscal year for the fee waivers provided by HB 123. There are ample funds in the account to help young Texans access driver's education.

The legislature can help fix this issue by clarifying the budget language and ensuring it aligns with the spirit of the original legislation that created these programs. We look forward to working with lawmakers to ensure this program effectively supports the vulnerable communities it was intended to serve.

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