



16.53 Eligibility for Independent Living Services	
Application: DCS Employees and Providers with Independent Living Services Responsibilities	
Authority: TCA 37-5-105(3), 37-5-106; John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transitions to Adulthood 42 U.S.C. § 677, Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, (ASFA , P.L. 105-89); Higher Education Act of 1965 P.L. 89-329; (As Amended Through P.L. 11831)	Standards: COA: PA-CFS 21
Commissioner:	Date:
Original Effective Date: 08/15/07 Current Effective Date: 05/07/24	Supersedes: DCS 16.53 07/14/23 Last Review Date: 05/07/24

Glossary:

- ◆ Education and Training Vouchers:
 - Educational and Training Vouchers were added to the Chafee Independence Program to assist youth and young adults connected with the foster care system with the high cost of post-high school education. Vouchers can be used for eligible two and four-year universities, vocational training programs, and job training programs.
- ◆ Extension or Re-Establishment of Foster Care Services for Young Adults:
 - The eligibility criteria and procedures associated with providing foster care services to young adults includes an array of services available to eligible persons. These services require a case designation with DCS, and include case management by assigned workers, independent living services and placement services (as applicable), but are voluntary and require a young adult's initial and on-going agreement to receive them.
- ◆ Family Service Worker/Juvenile Service Worker:
 - A DCS term used to identify the position previously known as the DCS Case Manager. This person is principally responsible for the case and has the primary responsibility of building, preparing, supporting, and maintaining the child and family team as the child moves to permanence.
- ◆ Worker
 - A term used to identify the position assigned the primary responsibility of building, preparing, supporting, and maintaining the child and family team and coordinating the provision of services, when that position is not within DCS. An example includes provider agency staff assigned to case manage Extension of Foster Care cases.
- ◆ Independent Living Allowance:
 - This is a service established to provide a foster care maintenance payment directly to young adults in supervised independent living settings. This is managed via a direct payment system designed to support eligible young adults as they gain self-sufficiency and to promote a successful transition to adulthood. Young adults will have the ability to readily access funds and utilize financial management skills.
- ◆ Independent Living Program Specialists:
 - Staff assigned to DCS Central Office who possess knowledge and expertise regarding independent living/transition planning procedures and the availability and administration of independent living services. They provide technical assistance on this basis to youth and young adults, DCS and provider agency staff, foster parents, and community partners.
- ◆ Placement Support:
 - Assistance provided to a youth or young adult through placement. Forms of assistance can include financial, educational, mentoring, counseling, etc.
- ◆ Bright Futures Scholarship:

- A scholarship administered by the DCS Office of Independent Living that utilizes DCS funds to promote access to higher education and increase opportunities to defray the high cost of post-secondary education to eligible youth. This scholarship can only be used to attend a Tennessee state educational institution. Priority is given to eligible youth who do not meet criteria for DCS' Chafee ETV program.
- ◆ Supervised Independent Living Setting:
 - Any housing arrangement with approval and ongoing oversight by DCS staff and, as applicable, a contracted provider. This can include placement services such as a DCS or provider agency foster home or facility, contracted independent living programs, or community-based housing arrangements that include ongoing case management for the young adult.
- ◆ Young Adults:
 - A person who meets the definition of an 'applicable child' according to the federal and state legislative and statutory guidelines for maintenance of federal IV-E foster care. These criteria are established in Section A of this policy.

Policy Statement:

DCS provides Independent Living Wraparound Services to custodial youth ages fourteen (14) to nineteen (19) to assist with expenses related to education, housing, transportation, job training and other items as approved by the Office of Independent Living. Young adults, ages eighteen (18) up to twenty-one (21), receiving Extension of Foster Care Services may receive Education and Training Vouchers and an Independent Living Allowance to assist with expenses related to Independent Living and Post-Secondary Education and Training opportunities, as well as some Independent Living Wraparound Services. Special contracts may be implemented to provide independent living services to youth and young adults in custody and those who have exited custody.

Purpose:

To provide funds and services to youth and young adults to support a successful transition to adulthood.

Procedures:**A. Eligibility for Independent Living (IL) Wraparound Services**

Independent Living Wraparound services are designed to support a wide range of independent living goals and needs. The specific application of these services is based on the general eligibility guidelines outlined in this policy section and is available in the

[*Identifying and Accessing Independent Living Services Manual*](#). When funding is not available, similar services should be explored using other available resources.

1. Youth in state custody, ages fourteen (14) to nineteen (19), are eligible for Independent Living (IL) Wraparound services as outlined in the [*Identifying and Accessing Independent Living Services Manual*](#). Family Service Workers (FSWs)/Juvenile Service Workers (JSWs) ensure that the needed services are provided and documented in TFACTS.
2. Youth in DCS custody residing in another state under the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) are eligible for independent living services. It is the responsibility of the receiving state to provide Chafee services or other services consistent with the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 when the youth exits DCS custody consistent with that state's policies and guidelines. Youth in this category are eligible for Education and Training Vouchers (ETV).
3. Youth adjudicated delinquent receive the same independent living service options, with the following restrictions: youth placed in secured facilities are not eligible for independent living wraparound services based on federal Chafee funds. Such facilities include the Youth Development Center and detention facilities. It is the placement facility's responsibility to provide comparable independent living services utilizing other available funding streams and resources.
4. Young adults receiving foster care services as provided by DCS policy [*16.52 Extension or Re-Establishment of Foster Care for Young Adults*](#), are eligible for specified independent living services and wraparound services as outlined in the [*Identifying and Accessing Independent Living Services Manual*](#).
5. Young adults who exited state custody to emancipation from foster care at or after age eighteen (18), and who are no longer receiving foster care services, are eligible for specified independent living services as outlined in the [*Identifying and Accessing Independent Living Services Manual*](#). Emancipated young adults must have been in foster care upon their eighteenth (18th) birthday to qualify.
6. Youth who exited state custody to permanency through adoption or Subsidized Permanent Guardianship at or after sixteen (16) years of age are eligible for specified Independent Living Services as outlined in the [*Identifying and Accessing Independent Living Services Manual*](#).
7. Youth and young adults receiving ETV assistance are not eligible to receive other Chafee funded services associated with post-secondary cost of attendance during the same semester/term.
8. Youth and young adults who are undocumented residents of the United States are not eligible for IL Wraparound Services once released from DCS custody. Otherwise eligible youth and young adults who are not in DCS custody must be U.S Citizens or meet qualified alien status.

B. Eligibility for the Independent Living Allowance (ILA)

Young adults eighteen (18) years of age up to their twenty-first (21st) birthday are eligible to receive the Independent Living Allowance (ILA) based on the following criteria:

1. The young adult must be eligible and approved to receive, Extension or Re-Establishment of Foster Care Services.
2. The young adult must be living in an approved Supervised Independent Living setting. However, this eligibility requirement only applies if the young adult is no longer receiving Placement Support. Supervised Independent Living settings are exclusive of programs funded by DCS under the Placement Support guidelines for the purpose of ILA eligibility.
3. The young adult must not be receiving certain other sources of funding assistance for housing to include paid reimbursements to DCS supported placements. Current recipients of Supplemental Security Income benefits (SSI) are not eligible for the ILA.
4. Eligible youth attend a training course coordinated by Independent Living Program Specialists and comply with all additional requirements in preparation for utilizing the ILA system as outlined in the [*Identifying and Accessing Independent Living Services Manual*](#). Otherwise, eligible young adults may receive Independent Living Allowance (ILA) rates based on the following:
 - a) The ILA payment amount is determined by a mutual agreement between the young adult and the DCS Office of Independent Living. An assessment to determine the applicable rate includes, but is not limited to, verification of employment (as applicable), development of a budget for living expenses, and identification of other financial resources that might be available to the young adult. The ILA rate is reviewed and regulated accordingly over time. The procedures for monitoring eligibility are available in Section C of this policy.
 - b) Independent Living Allowance (ILA) payments are based on a per diem rate. This is in accordance with the guidelines established by the DCS Office of Independent Living and the Office of Finance and Fiscal Support. Any rates (as noted in Section B-2 through B-5) are maintained in the **TFACTS** service rate structure. The Independent Living (IL) Unit ensures that the correct rates are in the **TFACTS** system.
 - ◆ **Regular Rate:** Check the following web link for the most current regular rate: <https://public.powerdms.com/TNDCS/documents/2099504>
 - ◆ . The Regular Rate is available for eligible young adults age eighteen (18) to their twenty-first (21st) birthday.
 - ◆ **Graduated Rate:** Check the following web link for the most current graduated rate: <https://public.powerdms.com/TNDCS/documents/2099504>The

Graduated Rate is available to eligible young adults age eighteen (18) to their twenty-first (21st) birthday. The Graduated Rate may be applied in circumstances when the young adult is determined to possess sufficient income and support from other resources.

- ◆ **Parenting Rate:** Check the following web link for the most current parenting rate: <https://public.powerdms.com/TNDCS/documents/2099504>
The Parenting Rate is available to eligible young adults age eighteen (18) to their twenty-first (21st) birthday. The Parenting Rate may be applied in circumstances when the young adult is the primary caretaker for a minor child.

When funding is not available, similar services should be explored through other available resources.

C. Maintenance of Eligibility for the Independent Living Allowance (ILA)

1. It is the responsibility of the young adult to provide needed and ongoing verifications of eligibility, according to the guidelines set forth in DCS policy [16.52, *Extension or Re-Establishment of Foster Care for Young Adults*](#), Section A.
2. The Office of Independent Living confirms the young adult's eligibility on a monthly basis, and adjusts the applicable rates or administration of the ILA, as needed. It is the responsibility of the assigned worker to communicate the necessary information to verify the young adult's eligibility to an Independent Living Program Specialist. Verification of the young adult's eligibility information must occur in advance of the monthly payment confirmation. No payment confirmation may occur without this verification.

D. Eligibility for Education and Training Vouchers (ETV)

1. Education and Training Vouchers (ETV) are only utilized to fund expenses for eligible post-secondary institutions. Enrollment must be for educational or vocational programs resulting in a degree or certification that are at least one (1) continuous academic year in duration. The DCS Scholarship Coordinator can be contacted to verify the eligibility of a chosen program. It should be noted that the accessibility of certain services rendered directly by DCS may vary based on the availability of funding. In such cases, similar services may need to be explored via other available resources.
2. Young adults who emancipate to adulthood directly from state custody at or after eighteen (18) years of age are eligible for ETVs except for those that exit state

custody directly from a secure facility. Secure facilities include the Youth Development Center and detention facilities.

3. Youth sixteen (16) years of age or older in DCS custody may be eligible for ETVs except for those currently placed in a secure facility.
4. Youth who exit DCS custody at ages sixteen (16) or older through adoption or Subsidized Permanent Guardianship are eligible for ETVs.
5. The total annual allocation of ETVs per youth/young adult cannot exceed \$5,000.
6. Young adults who are undocumented residents of the United States are not eligible for ETVs once released from DCS custody. Otherwise eligible youth and young adults who are not in DCS custody must be U.S Citizens or meet qualified alien status.

E. Maintenance of Eligibility for Education and Training Vouchers (ETVs)

1. Young adults maintain enrollment in an eligible post-secondary program.
2. Young adults maintain a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 2.0 or higher per semester in order to maintain eligibility for ETVs. Young adults attending a qualified vocational program maintain a passing outcome for each applicable period of evaluation. Discretion can be used to allow for allocation of ETVs for a second semester or term, if the semester or term that falls below a 2.0 GPA or passing outcome was the initial semester or term. Independent Living Program Review requests may be submitted for exceptions based on financial aid appeal outcomes.
3. When available, young adults participate in work-study as outlined by the postsecondary education program. Young adults are strongly encouraged to have a job if they are not attending school during summer breaks, unless attending summer semester classes full-time.
4. Young adults maintain sufficient enrollment to attain an applicable degree or certification within the guidelines for reasonable program completion, as set forth by the educational institution. A student's decision to apply for, or adjust their schedule to part-time attendance status, can result in forfeiture of otherwise established financial aid awards.

Note: This does not apply to summer semester attendance when attendance is in addition to an already established full-time academic year's schedule. Students attending school part-time are encouraged to work at least part-time.

5. ETVs are available to eligible young adults up to the twenty-sixth (26th) birthday. Young adults who receive an ETV award at twenty-five (25) years of age and reach their twenty-sixth (26th) birthday within the awarded semester or term, are eligible to maintain the award through that semester or term. No subsequent ETV

assistance is awarded for future terms or semesters. In no circumstance may a youth participate in the program for more than five (5) years.

6. Youth and young adults up to their twenty-sixth (26th) birthday who do not maintain the specified GPA or passing outcome for an applicable semester or evaluation period may be afforded one probationary term to achieve the specified GPA or passing outcome in order to continue receiving ETVs. Youth and young adults may receive ETV funding during this probationary term. Those who do not achieve the specified GPA or passing outcome for the probationary term do not receive ETV for the following term.
7. Factors that may jeopardize continued eligibility for ETVs, in addition to those already specified, may include youth and young adults:
 - ◆ Convicted of a felony offense;
 - ◆ Exhibiting a pattern of behavior that jeopardizes the safety and well-being of self or others; or
 - ◆ Establishing residence in another state or country.

It becomes the responsibility of a receiving state to provide Chafee and other services post-custody if a young adult establishes residence in that state. Exceptions may only be made when the receiving state refuses to provide assistance.

F. Eligibility for the Bright Futures Scholarship

1. Youth and young adults eligible for ETVs are also eligible for the Bright Futures Scholarship unless they have more than \$10,000 in personal assets. The accessibility of certain services rendered directly by DCS varies based on the availability of funding. In such cases, similar services may need to be explored through other available resources. ETV and the Bright Futures Scholarship cannot be provided during the same term.
2. The Bright Futures Scholarship can only be utilized to fund expenses for Tennessee state-sponsored post-secondary institutions. The DCS Scholarship Coordinator may be contacted to verify the eligibility of a chosen program.
3. Priority for Bright Futures Scholarship is given to youth and young adults not otherwise eligible for ETV.
4. Youth and young adults who are in custody and placed at or exited from Youth Development Centers and detention facilities at or after sixteen (16) years of age are eligible for the Bright Futures Scholarship.
5. Youth and young adults who lose eligibility for ETVs are eligible to apply for the Bright Futures Scholarship.
6. Youth and young adults who exited DCS custody to permanency at or after sixteen (16) years of age are eligible for the Bright Futures Scholarship.

7. Youth and young adults who are undocumented residents of the United States are not eligible for the Bright Futures Scholarship. Otherwise eligible youth and young adults who are not in DCS custody must be U.S Citizens or meet qualified alien status.
8. The total annual allocation of Bright Futures Scholarship per youth/young adult cannot exceed \$5,000.

G. Maintenance of Eligibility for the Bright Futures Scholarship

The same guidelines for maintenance of eligibility for ETVs (as outlined in Section E of this Policy) are applied to the Bright Futures Scholarship, once administration of the scholarship begins with the following exception: applicants for the Bright Futures Scholarship may have countable assets of no more than \$10,000. The award may be provided to otherwise eligible applicants up to their twenty-sixth (26th) birthday.

1. Youth or young adults who establish residency in another state are not eligible for the Bright Futures Scholarship.

H. Special Contracts and Partnerships

1. DCS establishes contracts and partnerships with external agencies to provide independent living services. Contracts may change from year to year based on funding availability and identified areas of need.
2. The services available and the specific guidelines of eligibility to receive the services vary and are outlined within each contract's scope of services. This information is also provided in the [*Identifying and Accessing Independent Living Services Manual*](#).

Forms:

[*CS-0599, Application for Post-Secondary Funding*](#)

[*CS-0762, Independent Living Allowance Agreement*](#)

Collateral Documents:

[*Identifying and Accessing Independent Living Services Manual*](#)

[*Family Permanency Plan Development Guide*](#)