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Renee McGuinness

Vermont Family Alliance Policy Analyst

Vermontfamilyalliance.com

tedm@gmavt.net

802-238-2076

Senate Committee on Health & Welfare

H.657 An act relating to various programming and requirements within the Department for Children and Families, Section 4 “Unaccompanied Youth”, pages 20 – 26.

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2026/Docs/BILLS/H-0657/H-0657%20As%20passed%20by%20the%20House%20Official.pdf>

1. Vermont Family Alliance (VFA) is grateful for the amendment on the House floor on March 27, 2026, to Section 4 (a) that clarifies that access to certain services for certified unaccompanied minors is for minors, “in which severe family dysfunction such as abuse, neglect, child abandonment” is determined under The Department of Children and Families’ (DCF) due process.
2. VFA requests that Senate Health & Welfare amend H.657, Section 4, (a) (pages 20-21) strike “or lack of financial support,” because a lack of financial means is not a determining factor in parents’ or guardian’s capacity to oversee their children’s upbringing and provide consent to services for their minor-age children, nor does lack of financial means mean parents or guardians are being abusive, neglectful, or have abandoned their own child. Proof of abandonment through DCF due process is the only way to know whether parents have actively withdrawn financial support for their own children.

Representative Jubilee McGill told the House Committee on Judiciary on March 18 that a child would be considered an unaccompanied minor if a family is kicked out of the hotel

program and the parents are living in a tent while their child is couch-surfing. This description of an “unaccompanied minor” fails due process under the DCF to determine whether the parents or guardians are abusive, neglectful, or have abandoned their child.

3. VFA notes that Section 4 (a) “and other supports such as foster care are deemed inappropriate” lacks definition of circumstances under which foster care would be deemed inappropriate, and requests further definition.

4. VFA requests that Senate Health & Welfare refine Section 4, (3) (page 22) definition of “Unaccompanied Youth” to ensure that only youth for which it has been determined under DCF due process that the parents are abusive, neglectful, or have abandoned their child might be qualified to receive certain services stated in H.657.

“Unaccompanied youth’ means a homeless child or youth 16 or 17 years of age who is not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian” is too broad and does not necessarily mean that parents are unable to provide consent to services for their minor-age children. Such a broad definition of “unaccompanied youth” conflicts with the necessity to ascertain under DCF due process whether parents are abusive, neglectful, or have abandoned their own child.

Suggested definition of “unaccompanied youth”: means a homeless youth 16 or 17 years of age for whom it has been determined by DCF to have been abandoned by their parents or guardians.

5. VFA takes issue with Elevate Youth Services, a non-profit, non-governmental organization, being legally assigned to the task of developing a standardized form to certify qualifying “unaccompanied” youth. DCF should create this form.

6. Section 4 (f) and (g) “immunity for liability”. VFA would like to see safeguards put in place to ensure that certification forms presented to entities with whom a youth wishes to contract are not fraudulent. (pages 25 – 26)

7. Section 4 (f) and (g) immunity from liability except for gross negligence. VFA requests that “fraud” be added. (pages 25 - 26)