

New Law Provides Extended Health Care To Foster Kids

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Bill signing with Governor Jeb Bush.

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. -- A bill signed into law Monday will make life a little easier for the hundreds of foster children who turn 18 in Florida every year.

Previously, teens were cut off from health care and other state benefits on their 18th birthdays. With the new bill, the state is extending a safety net to help them become responsible adults, WESH 2 News reported.

The new law extends health benefits for two years so foster kids aren't suddenly left without any medical coverage once they turn 18. The people who successfully lobbied for it were all former or current foster kids themselves.

The law means a lot to Linda Grund. In foster care since she was 8 years old, Grund joined the military at 17 to support herself. But she said she knows many teens struggling just to survive.

"Some youth told stories of when they were 18 they went to the homeless shelter," Grund said. "They had no other options. A lot of them didn't know of the resources that are out there and just fell through the loop."

State law previously cut off medical coverage on a foster child's 18th birthday, even if

the teen was in the middle of their senior year of high school and didn't have a job or the ability to pay for health insurance.

Karen Gievers, an attorney who advocates on behalf of foster children, said those with ongoing medical problems or a sudden accident or injury were left out in the cold.

"There are still real holes in the safety net that our youngsters in the state foster system have to deal with," Gievers said. "But now at least these kids will have more assistance."

The bill also provides help with college costs, even if the teen can only afford to go part-time. Grund said she hopes it will help other young people like herself turn difficult childhoods into positive adulthoods.

The bill will also require the state to start helping foster children as young as 13 plan for life after state care by setting education and employment goals.