

Celebrating Passage of SB272/HB1101 following years of Florida Youth SHINE & Florida's Children First advocacy!

After 5 years of Florida Youth SHINE members sharing stories with legislators on the importance of youth in care being educated on the protections, benefits, and rights in place to help them thrive, Florida Youth SHINE (FYS) prevailed! Senate Bill 272/ House Bill 1101, sponsored by Senator Garcia and Representative Tramont, also known as the “Nancy C. Detert Champion for Children Act,” was signed into law.

For kids in Florida's Foster Care system, not knowing about their rights and the laws in place has been a long-time problem for them. In fact, although Florida has many great laws and resources available to children, Florida had no educational process or requirement to inform youth in care about these resources and rights. Florida Youth SHINE (FYS) and Florida's Children First have been working on efforts to educate children about their rights for nearly two decades, and now there is finally a law that requires the State to educate children about them as well.

This monumental law will help protect children and help them thrive. The child welfare system is complex and can be confusing to children. For example, children who aren't aware of the law may think they are unable to be on a sports team, be kept safe, go to college, or have a job, simply because they are in foster care. The new law creates a clear process to educate youth in foster care, in a developmentally appropriate, consistent way, about important laws that the legislature has passed to help them succeed.

A Story of Resiliency and Advocacy...



We are so proud of Florida Youth SHINE members, and their resiliency. In 2018, FYS members chose this as their legislative priority, and since then they have never given up, despite a long road filled with challenges and obstacles. When we talk about our young people being resilient, we don't always think about their resiliency while advocating. It's tough to share their stories, and

hundreds of FYS members throughout the last five years have advocated, testified before committees, and spoken with legislators about this bill.

As a result of Florida Youth SHINE's Advocacy Efforts, SB 272/HB 1101 will...

- Ensure foster youth are provided with information and resources to thrive and become successful adults.
- Create a clear educational process for children in foster care to be educated on important laws such as safety, education, contact with siblings, normalcy, and access to food, shelter, and healthcare.
- Require case managers to inform foster children about the laws and protections every six months, or upon every placement change at a developmentally (age-appropriate levels) and to provide those children with information and Florida's approved developmentally appropriate materials.
- Help case managers and caregivers be fully informed of the existing resources available to the children they help.
- Create the Office of the Ombudsman to promote transparency, accountability and serve as a resource to youth when they feel their rights are violated.
- Ensure that youth adopted or placed in guardianship after age 16 can participate in the Keys to Independence Program.

A word from Florida Youth SHINE Members...



“Youth in foster care aren’t aware of the laws that can benefit them, but by educating them and reminding them of laws and resources, they can have a better experience in foster care. FYS has been advocating for this for a long time. We paid attention to the legislative process, learned a lot along the way, and worked with legislators to ensure this language will help the foster care system. This showed Florida Youth SHINE members that change is a process, and that dedication and passion can help influence change. It is an amazing feeling to know that our voices came together to make that change.”

-Selena

“Florida has great laws meant to help children and young adults, but they don’t do any good if youth don’t know about them.”

-Kyle



“Florida Youth SHINE has been asking the state to do better in educating youth about the protections and benefits of the law since 2018. Members identified this priority because, as a former foster youth who was not informed of my rights and resources while in care, I realize it is important to educate youth in care about their ability to attend court, see siblings, and gain guidance when aging out of care, as it will help youth transition into successful adults and advocates for their own rights.”

-Rebekka

Now - with passage of THIS bill - their peers in care for years to come will be better informed and positioned to flourish when they transition to independent living.

Thank you to all the FYS youth who bravely spoke out over the years. Thank you to the many legislators, DCF officials, and decision-makers who made time to listen to the voices of the young people they serve.

And to our mentors, colleagues, and supporters. We could not have prevailed without your efforts and belief in the work we do to ensure all of Florida’s children are safe, supported, and respected.



Remembering Sen. Nancy Detert, A True Champion for Florida's Children

The bill is named the "Nancy C. Detert Champion for Children Act" in honor of former Senator Nancy Detert who recently passed away. It was so special for FYS to have this bill dedicated in her honor, as they worked closely with her over the years to advocate for laws like normalcy, extended foster care, keys to independence and more. In honor of Senator Detert's everlasting impact, we want to share with you the impact her work had on FYS members and foster youth around the state, and the special legacy she left for years to come.

Florida lost a warrior for children this April with the passing of Sen. Nancy Detert, a legislative champion for children who truly cared about helping kids in the foster care system.



In 2012 Senator Detert met with young Florida Youth SHINE members. She listened to their stories, and she was moved not just by their circumstances, but by their candor and courage for sharing their experiences with her and fellow legislators. She then fought *for* them, and became committed to improving the prospects and protections of all youth coming after them.

Her efforts working with Florida Youth SHINE year after year as they came to Tallahassee to educate and advocate for change, produced monumental improvements to Florida's system of care that have since helped thousands of young people succeed in life and SHINE. Indeed, many of her legislative initiatives went on to become national policy.

Her "we can do it" attitude and fierce determination to "get the job done" for kids in care lives on with SB 272 being titled in her honor.

Now, kids will have knowledge of the many laws she fought to enact, such as:

Extending Foster Care through the age of 21, and providing Independent Living Support (PESS) to foster youth, and formally the Road to Independence

Extending the college tuition waiver for students who age out of nonrelative care or are in nonrelative care

Keeping siblings together or ensuring they have visitation or communication with one another

Helping protect children from identity theft by allowing caregivers to place a security freeze on the credit report of children under 16 in their care.

Providing drivers licenses, auto insurance, and drivers education to youth in, and from, foster care (Keys to Independence)



"Working with Florida Youth SHINE and children in the foster care system has been a highlight of my career. It's given me a life of meaning and purpose."

-Senator Nancy C. Detert, 2022



Thank you Senator Detert for helping so many of us thrive and helping our voices be heard by the legislators for our future brothers and sisters in care.

YOU Can Make a Difference in a Child's Life!

The work we do changes lives today ... and for decades to come. It leaves a legacy that positively impacts generations of youth who enter the system each year. It's unique work that fills a gap in the child-serving system. And it often takes years to see through – like this year's triumph.

For each trip kids in care make to Tallahassee or other locations to share their truths, we provide transportation, professional clothing, housing accommodations, and more in addition to mentorship and preparation oversight. Often, these trips trigger difficult memories for the youth – so we do strategic sharing that helps them heal.

All of this takes resources and there is much yet to do. And with more, we can do more. Please help us keep this vital work going. \$250 can help us send a youth to a quarterly training while \$2500 can help a youth participate on our innovative Policy and Initiative team gaining valuable career, leadership and life experience in civic engagement and policy work. Make a contribution of any amount today and make difference, just like Florida Youth SHINE members have made in the lives of children.

[CLICK HERE TO DONATE NOW!](#)

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