



AN ACT STRENGTHENING TRANSITIONAL PLANNING AND INCREASING ACCOUNTABILITY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR FAMILIES

H.752 / S.313 , filed by Rep. Whipps and Sen. Comerford

Requires transition plans to be developed at least one year before an individual's transition to adult services, allowing more time for individuals and families to work with the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) to plan and prepare. Creates a commission to study gaps in the system and opportunities to improve the turning 22 process for all.

CONTEXT

- Many individuals with disabilities remain served by special education services until they turn 22, at which time they transition into the adult system.
- Though Massachusetts provides a transition planning process for young adults with disabilities as they age into adult services, many families struggle to receive transparent information and guidance from the state. Many report falling off a proverbial cliff when their loved one turns 22, losing access to critical services.

THE BILL

- Requires that transition plans be developed at least one year before the transition to adult services, allowing families more time to prepare for the transition.
- Requires more reporting about the costs of programs, to ensure that lawmakers can adequately fund services, especially as the number of people turning 22 grows.
- Creates a commission to study gaps in services and develop a comprehensive plan. In particular, the commission will review solutions for ensuring more frequent communication, increasing awareness of services available during and after the transition, and improving the service coordinator program and the chapter 688 referral process. The commission will also focus on those with complex needs, ensuring that those who require a residential placement can remain where they are if an alternative is not available, and addressing unique challenges for those who are leaving the care of the Department of Children and Families.

THE IMPACT

The turning 22 "cliff" presents many challenges to individuals and families. All are entitled to the special education services that they receive up until their 22nd birthday. Overnight at this transition, many lose access to their services. Each year, the group of individuals turning 22 becomes larger, and their needs are increasing in complexity. This bill provides individuals, families, and the state with the necessary tools to be better prepared for this transition and to meet this growing need.

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