

April 12, 2013

Gov. Scott signs foster care bill to give kids more normal lives

Gov. **Rick Scott** on Thursday signed a bill on Thursday that will help children in the foster care system lead a more normal life.

Surrounded by legislators, advocates, and dozens of kids who are either now or have been in foster care, the governor said that under this new law (SB 164), "foster parents who apply the reasonable and prudent parent standard will be able to give their foster children permission to join a soccer team, ride in the car with their best friend -- some of the things we all take for granted -- take a trip to the beach without state involvement.

"As a father and now grandfather," Scott said, "I know how important it is for children to experience things outside of the home, develop relationships and learn skills that are imperative for developing independence, like driving a car. Currently, only 3 percent of 18-year-old children who leave foster care do so with a driver's license, Scott said.

The idea, he said is to "let kids be kids."

Of the state's nearly 19,000 kids in foster care, about 9,000 live in foster care homes or group homes.

"Too many times our network of DCF (Department of Children and Families) and community based care just puts all these controls over kids," said DCF Secretary **David Wilkins**. "A child under state's care ought to have every right that every other kid has. That's what this bill does."

Wilkins said the new law will make it easier for kids to participate in extracurricular activities and allow foster parents to "take kids to all their sporting events, dance classes and all their afterschool events, take them on vacations and field trips and not feel they have to go to court to get approvals or do background checks on people. ..Teenagers want to go on a sleepover they don't want to be ostracized from their friends knowing that their friends are going to be background checked before they go over there."

Bill sponsor Sen. **Nancy Detert**, R-Venice, said the new law reflects "the wishes of foster care kids themselves and guardian ad litem." Rep. **Ben Albritton**, R-Wauchula, sponsored the House version.

Alan Abramowitz, Guardian Ad Litem's executive director, said "On July 1, our statutes will reflect the values we hold for children in foster care. The law will recognize them not as 'foster kids,' but just kids."

Manushka Gilet, 17, one of more than two dozen members of the foster care advocacy group Florida Youth Shine, who attended the pres conference, said the law "will make a big difference in our lives."

Members of Florida Youth Shine have spoken at legislative meetings for months to convey the need for changes in the system. "All their hard work has paid off," said **Christina Spudeas**, executive director of Florida's Children First, the umbrella organization for Florida Youth Shine. "This bill absolutely will have an impact."