

This report being submitted by the Department of Children and Family Services pursuant to the Children and Family Services Act, 20 ILCS 505/5.46(e). The section of the Act directs the Department to file a report with the General Assembly providing the following information:

*(e) By July 1, 2024, the Department shall provide a report to the General Assembly regarding youth in care who receive benefits who are not subject to this Act. The report shall discuss a goal of expanding conservation of children's benefits to all benefits of all children of any age for whom the Department serves as representative payee. The report shall include a description of any identified obstacles, steps to be taken to address the obstacles, and a description of any need for statutory, rule, or procedural changes.*

Illinois DCFS is currently conserving Title XVI (SSI) benefits for all youth in care 14 years of age and older. These totals represent the number of ABLÉ accounts and total dollar contributions for youth receiving SSI meeting the ABLÉ Statute since 1-1-2023 that are currently in care as of 11-7-2024. These numbers exclude any of the SSA Title II dollars being conserved within internal DCFS Trust Accounts. In total Illinois DCFS has conserved \$5.6 million in SSI dollars for youth within our ABLÉ program.

Age	# of Accounts	ABLE Contributions
Over 18	323	\$ 2,382,186.68
18	170	\$ 1,265,863.84
17	149	\$ 885,265.53
16	140	\$ 619,105.82
15	114	\$ 367,544.43
14	34	\$ 84,979.02
Total	930	\$ 5,604,945.32

Illinois DCFS has made the decision to expand the conservation of benefits beyond the current Illinois legislation related to Title II SSA survivor benefits. Effective November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023, DCFS conserves 100% of Title II SSA survivor benefits regardless of the age of the youth. These funds are conserved within our DCFS trust accounting system in interest bearing accounts and eventually redistributed to the youth upon exiting foster care. The estimated impact is roughly \$10-12 million annually conserved in Title II benefits directly for Illinois youth in care.

Illinois DCFS has overcome multiple barriers and experienced a lot of positives in launching a successful ABLÉ program within Illinois. With the great collaboration from our partners at the Illinois State Treasurer's office (ISTO), we have been able to successfully conserve youth's benefits applicable to statute 20 ILCS 505/5.46. Illinois DCFS is currently working with ISTO and Ascensus (ACS - physical banking parent associated with federal ABLÉ accounts) to better streamline processes and provide the best support for your youth in care.

Current process/program initiatives being worked on are:

- Taking ABLE account enrollment from paper applications to an online web-based platform that will allow for easier enrollment of DCFS youth.
- Re-evaluating a better way to help transition accounts upon youth's exit from foster care and best approaches to ensure youth and families are transitioning ABLE accounts timely.
- Ongoing creation and revamping of ABLE educational material for families and case workers within DCFS.
- More collaboration between Illinois DCFS and ACS to assist in accounts being created timely after an application has been submitted by DCFS.
- Evaluating additional reconciliation processes on the ACS side to ensure any wired dollars sent to ACS that were outside of program eligibility guidelines are reverted back timely and accurately.

Illinois's recent analysis of expanding the conservation of benefits below age 14, provides a \$12.5 million loss in Title IV-E claiming for the Department, due to Federal requirements only allowing States to claim SSI or Title IV-E (State's cannot receive both). Based FY24 data, the population of youth receiving SSI benefits under age 14 in DCFS care is around 975 youth. Illinois DCFS has been an active leader is meeting with other State's to discuss our business practices associated with conserving funds and the level of effort on implementation on a program of this size.

Ongoing discussions are being held with State & Federal leaders to come up with ideas that could offset the amount of funding states would lose associated with conserving 100% of the Social Security benefits. Illinois has recommended multiple ideas and is hoping that the AFDC standard of need income tables associated with Title IV-E claiming would be evaluated and updated. These income standards are utilized to assess the household income on biological parents for initial title IV-E determinations upon a youth's entry into foster care. These income standards are still from 1996, which leads to a very unfavorable amount of ineligible IV-E determinations in Illinois impacting our claiming that funds roughly one-third of DCFS operations.

For questions or additional information regarding this report, Jeremy Wheeler, DCFS Federal Financial Participation Manager, can be contacted at 217-785-9477 or emailed at [Jeremy.Wheeler@illinois.gov](mailto:Jeremy.Wheeler@illinois.gov).