



# Florida Youth SHINE News

**Derrick Riggins**

Statewide Chair  
Sarasota

**Lindsay Baach**

Youth Coordinator  
Ft. Lauderdale

**Christina Spudeas**

FCF Executive Director  
Ft. Lauderdale

## Bill Updates

**SB 1902**

**Independent Living  
(Sen. Rich)**

**HB 5307**

**Cuts RTI at 21  
(Rep. Hudson)**

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## A message from Our Chair

*"Everybody can be great because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love."*

- Martin Luther King Jr.



Representing 9 of our 10 chapters, 20 members walked the halls of the Capitol during Children's Week with pride and advocated for the needs of the children and young adults growing up in the child welfare system. By sharing our stories at various meetings with state legislators we actively worked to educate our lawmakers on the unique needs of our population. But first we spent the weekend learning about the pending bills moving through committees that would directly affect the foster care system (we chose to focus in on SB 1902 and HB 1241 both improving upon the current Independent Living program and extending foster care services to the age of 21). We also focused on the skills needed to speak with our legislators – strategic sharing, public speaking, media training, and talking points – skills we know your chapter leaders will bring home to share with all of you. I was so proud of our members and truly enjoyed watching them grow into advocates. The young adults who we have the honor of working with in FYS truly took ownership of our mission and impressed me with their courage to speak earnestly with each of the legislators we met. And what a difference our team made!

In addition to the impact we made within the walls of the Capitol, FYS members also had the honor of holding an advocacy training workshop for middle and high school students who were in Tallahassee to participate in the Children's Week festivities. This is truly a highlight for all of our members (and a great tool to use within chapters as well) as we were able to teach youth outside the reach of Florida Youth SHINE the keys to being a well spoken advocate on any topic. We look forward to continuing this tradition again next year!

### Additional Children's Week Highlights:

- We had the special honor of meeting with Lt. Governor Jennifer Carroll, who has a personal understanding of our issues.
- FYS members presented former DCF Secretary George Sheldon with the Chiles Advocacy Award at the Children's Week Awards Reception
- Dinner with DCF Secretary David Wilkins (with a special guest appearance by Justice Quince from the Florida Supreme Court)

### Special Thank You's:

- All of the Florida legislators who took the time to meet with and listen to FYS members. We enjoyed meeting Lt. Governor Jennifer Carroll; Senators Haridopolis, Rich, Storms, Alexander, Wise, Detert, Hill, Oelrich, and Flores; and Representatives Grimsley, Glorioso, Chestnut, Porth, Ray, Hudson, Corcoran, Schwartz, Pafford, Weinstein, Cruz, Dorworth, Thompson, and Stafford.
- The adult supporters who took time out of their schedules to spend time with us.
- Florida's Children First for helping host FYS in Tallahassee this year.
- The CBC's and local non-profits that helped sponsor all of our members in attendance.
- And most importantly, thank you to each and every member of FYS who participated during Children's Week for giving up their time to advocate on behalf of all our brothers and sisters in care.

As we get ready for new leadership within FYS let's not forget the path that was taken for us to get to the point that we are at. Let us keep growing and using our voice to effect change and make sure that our brothers and sisters have it a little better than we did when we came through the child welfare system. I love each and every one of you and thank you all for making Children's Week and FYS a huge success.

--Derrick Riggins





# FLORIDA Youth SHINE News



## Legislative Updates

### SB 1902 -- Independent Living

This is a complete rewrite of the existing IL law. Includes language to provide educational advocates for youth in care, extends foster care services to 21, and increases accountability within the system.

- Passed on Senate Floor (5/4/11); we hope it will be presented to House for a vote 5/5/11
- FYS **supports** this bill

### HB 5307 -- Cuts RTI at 21

The language in this bill would lower the age for young adults receiving the Road to Independence stipend from the age of 23 to the age of 21. This language is now included in SB 2146.

- FYS **opposes** this bill

## The Details - SB 1902 & HB 5307

### SB 1902 – Independent Living (Senator Rich)

This bill was passed today, May 4, 2011 unanimously by the Senate. We hope it will be presented to the House May 5, 2011 for a vote. It greatly improves foster care by extending foster care to age 21, concentrating on education by providing an education advocate for foster youth from middle school and beyond, and contains substantial reporting requirements of the providers to determine if they are providing sufficient educational supports, etc. The bill is also being heard with the following amendments:

- Smooths the transition to the new program for current RTI recipients by maintaining current RTI payments and housing arrangements. (Proposed by Sen. Rich)
- Extending Foundations First (extended foster care) and College Bound services to youth who have been adopted or placed into permanent guardianship after the age of 16. (Proposed by Sen. Rich)
- Includes vocational programming in the criteria for the College Bound program. (Proposed by Sen. Rich)
- Requires kids who are in care and become pregnant (mother and/or father) to be advised of adoption options. (Proposed by Sen. Lynn)

### HB 5307 – Department of Children and Family Services (Representative Hudson)

This bill would change the age at which services end for all young adults aging out of foster care from 23 to 21. This bill is on the table in the house. Florida Youth SHINE **opposes** this bill as we realize it would prevent former foster youth from successfully completing a college or vocational program.





# FLORIDA Youth SHINE News



Sen. Rich



Rep. Grimsley



Lt. Gov. Carroll

## A WORD FROM:

Andrea Cowart, Pinellas/Pasco

This experience with Florida Youth SHINE in Tallahassee was so incredibly empowering. As well as being an amazing learning experience this trip was also an exercise in self discovery. Advocating is something that I would wholeheartedly recommend for every person who has ever felt alone, unimportant, helpless, or made to feel like a victim at a time in their life. To be able to take all of the detrimental experiences that we inevitably acquire over our years in care and use those experiences in unison with our voices to create change in a system that has ruled (often unjustly) the better part of our lives, is healing to a degree that I had yet to recognize, in a time in my life when I thought that the healing process had come largely to an end. Though I will never be able to undo the things that were done to me, nor the things I have done, I know now that I would not, because those experiences good and bad give me a power that is bigger than myself and the determination to fight for change for those that will come behind me in our system of care. What I think gives Florida Youth SHINE their power is that we do not approach each person, each issue, each struggle, each reason to celebrate, or each reason to give thanks as an organization or even as a team but as a family. Every member is valued, every member is considered, every strength, and every weakness. Every person is lifted up and given a time to shine and every member is willing step back to let their brother or sister take their place in the spotlight. I am so proud to call this group of bright and motivated young adults, and the dynamic, determined, adult supporters that stand behind us, my family.



Sec. Wilkins



Rep. Glorioso



Sen. Storms



FYS Adult Supporters



Sen. Pres. Haridopolos and FYS Members

