

DRIVE TO THRIVE

VIRGINIA'S DRIVERS LICENSING PROGRAM



GUIDELINES FOR TRANSPORTATION RELATED FUNDING FOR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE/FOSTERING FUTURES

BUDGET LINES:

877 - DRIVE TO THRIVE

862 - CHAFEE

861 - ETV



 www.fostermifutures.com

 va.ilp@dss.virginia.gov

 [FUSION-Services For Youth and Young Adults](#)



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF
SOCIAL SERVICES

Table of Contents

<u>Purpose</u>	3
<u>Drive to Thrive Program</u>	4
<u>Restrictions</u>	5
<u>Requesting Drive to Thrive Funds</u>	5
<u>Utilizing Chafee and ETV Funds to Assist in Transportation Goals</u>	6
<u>Car Purchases/Repairs</u>	7
<u>Solutions to Assist Youth in Getting Behind the Wheel</u>	8
<u>Barriers without Solutions</u>	11



www.fostermymyfuture.com



va.ilp@dss.virginia.gov



[FUSION-Services For Youth and Young Adults](#)



Purpose

Youth in foster care face significant barriers to obtaining a driver's license. According to a 2018 report by the Virginia Commission on Youth, only five percent of youth in foster care obtained their driver's license by their 18th birthday¹. In 2023, data from Virginia's Youth Exit Surveys showed that only 17 percent of youth had access to a car to learn to drive, and 25 percent reported they were not allowed to obtain a driver's license. Having a driver's license is essential for promoting normalcy and supporting a successful transition to adulthood.

Youth with foster care experience who participated in a focus group emphasized that having a driver's license provides independence and reliable transportation for school and work. However, they also reported needing support and resources to obtain required documentation from the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), covering the cost of car insurance and DMV fees, and access to a car for driving practice. Without a driver's license individuals with foster care experience face limitations in employment, education and housing opportunities.

This guide is designed to provide local department of social services (LDSS) with information on Virginia's statewide driver's licensing program (Drive to Thrive) for youth in foster care and those in the Fostering Futures program. In addition, it offers guidance on utilizing other funding sources when Drive to Thrive funds are not allowable or available, ensuring youth have access to resources that support their driving and transportation needs. This Guide has three sections:

- **Drive to Thrive Program (Budget Line 877)**
- **Utilizing Chafee (Budget Line 862) and Education and Training Voucher (ETV) funds (Budget Line 861) to Assist in Transportation Goals**
- **Solutions to Assist Youth in Getting Behind the Wheel**

¹ [Final Report Foster Youth Driver's Licenses.pdf \(virginia.gov\)](#).

Drive to Thrive Program

(Budget Line 877)

The Appropriation Act directed the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) to develop and implement a statewide driver's licensing program for youth in foster care, including those participating in Fostering Futures. This program, known as **Drive to Thrive**, aims to support youth in care by helping them obtain a driver's license and securing car insurance. VDSS is also required to create educational or training materials for foster parents, private providers, and youth in care on various driving-related topics.

Allowable Uses of Drive to Thrive Funds

Funds may be used for the following categories:

1. DRIVER EDUCATION AND LICENSING

Driver's Education Courses

- Private driving school courses when not available through the youth's high school or if they have missed the opportunity to complete the course in school.

Behind-the-Wheel/Private Driving Lessons

- Required practice hours when a youth does not have access to a vehicle for learning.
- Youth under 18 must complete at least 45 hours of driving practice, which can cost \$2,000-\$3,000.

DMV fees

- Photo identification
- Learner's permit
- Driver's license fees
- Title and registration fees

2. CAR INSURANCE

Youth's Own Car Insurance Policy

- Drive to Thrive funds may cover **up to six months** of insurance premiums within any 12-month period, whether the youth own a vehicle or needs a non-owner policy.

Foster Parent's/Caregiver Auto Insurance Policy Increase

- Reimbursement for the youth's portion of the increase when added to the caregiver's **existing** motor vehicle insurance policy.
 - Youth's portion only not the entire family car insurance bill
 - Appropriate documentation to verify proof of insurance and/or any increases required.
- Reimbursement is provided monthly for as long as the youth is covered.
- Funds may also cover additional liability insurance coverage and one insurance deductible per fiscal year related to a vehicle incident.

Restrictions

Drive to Thrive funds cannot be used for:

- Car repairs,
- Vehicle purchases,
- Fines
- Towing

Requesting Drive to Thrive Funds

To access these funds, the local department of social services (LDSS) must:

1. Complete the [Drive to Thrive Funds Request Form](#),
 - The form is located on FUSION under [Services for Youth and Young Adults](#).
 - Email the completed form to va.ilp@dss.virginia.gov.
2. Form Review and Approval
 - VDSS will review the form for accuracy, confirming:
 - The youth's participation in foster care or Fostering Futures.
 - The most recent and updated LSA and TP are documented on both the request form, and in Oasis on the IL Information Screen.
 - LDSS will be notified within **three business days** of approval.
3. Submit Budget Request
 - After approval, LDSS must submit a Budget Request System (BRS) request in LASER under **Budget Line 877**.
 - LDSS must establish Budget Line 877 at their agency before accessing funds.
4. Use of Funds
 - Approved funds must be used within **sixty days (60)** of receipt of funds.
 - Drive to Thrive funds should be utilized before Chafee and ETV funds for eligible expenses.

Utilizing Chafee and/or ETV Funds to Assist in Transportation Goals

The John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (the **Chafee Program**) provides funding to assist youth and young successful transition to adulthood. These funds can support a wide range of needs, including education, employment, financial management, housing, emotional support, and transportation assistance.

Local department of social services (LDSS) may use Chafee funds (Budget line 862) and/or Education and Training Voucher (ETV) funds (budget line 861) based on availability of funds, to support transportation-related expenses that help youth get behind the wheel when they are not eligible for Drive To Thrive funds but meet Chafee and/or ETV eligibility requirements.

- See the determination chart below for guidance.
- Refer to [FY\(##\) Chafee and ETV Funding Package](#) for detailed eligibility requirements.
- When using ETV funds for transportation expenses, the expense must directly support the student's travel to and from college, university, or post-secondary vocational training programs.

Qualifying Chafee expenses can include:

Education Courses - All courses to assist youth in obtaining and maintaining their driver's license. These courses include:

Driver's Education Courses

- Private driving school courses when not available through the youth's high school or if they have missed the opportunity to complete the course in school.

Behind-the-Wheel/Private Driving Lessons

- Required practice hours when a youth does not have access to a vehicle for learning.
- Youth under 18 must complete at least 45 hours of driving practice, which can cost \$2,000-\$3,000.

Car Insurance

Youth's Own Car Insurance Policy

- up to **six-months** in a 12-month period,
- not to be used in conjunction with Drive to Thrive funds.
- If there are extenuating circumstances, please reach out by email to the Youth Services team at va.ilp@dss.virginia.gov.

Car Purchases/Repairs

Chafee funds can be used to assist youth with car purchases and car repairs. **Drive to Thrive funds cannot be used for car repairs, purchasing vehicles, fines and towing.** Only ETV eligible students requiring transportation assistance for the purpose of attending (traveling to) school are eligible to use ETV funds for car purchases and car repairs. Eligible amount is based on the youth [ETV student application](#).

Car Purchase – Showing financial responsibility prior to a vehicle purchase will avoid situations in which a youth cannot afford to keep their vehicle on the street legally. Youth may be eligible for assistance in purchasing a car using Chafee funds; however, regular Chafee funds (budget Line 862) are very limited.

LDSS can use **up to \$2000.00** of Chafee funds towards the purchase of a vehicle. It is recommended that youth contribute to the cost. For example, if a youth has saved \$2000, LDSS can provide a matching amount of **up to** \$2000 to assist with the purchase.

VDSS suggests offering up to \$2,000 per youth who requests assistance, but agencies should remain mindful of their budgets. While we aim to provide transportation resources for all youth, it may not be feasible for every agency to offer the full \$2,000. At the end of the fiscal year, if funds remain available, agencies may use their best judgment and practices to decide whether to exceed the suggested \$2,000 limit.

Car Repairs – It is important to keep youth's vehicles on the road so they can continue to get to work or school. The suggested amount is **up to \$1,000** Chafee funds per year. Agencies should be mindful of their budgets when allocating funds for repairs. While we want to support youth in maintaining reliable transportation, it may not be feasible for every agency to offer the full suggested amount. At the end of the fiscal year, if funds remain available, agencies may use their best judgment and practices to decide whether to exceed the suggested \$1,000 limit.

ELIGIBLE YOUTH AND FUNDING SOURCE

(Use Drive to Thrive funds first for eligible youth and their expenses)

Youth's Status	Ages	Funding Source
Foster Care <ul style="list-style-type: none">Includes non-citizen youth in foster care	15.5 to 18	Drive to Thrive Program
Fostering Futures <ul style="list-style-type: none">Includes non-citizen youth in Fostering Futures	18 to 21	Drive to Thrive Program
ETV Eligible Youth	15.5 to 26	ETV
Formerly in Foster Care <ul style="list-style-type: none">Left foster care after turning 14 for reasons other than adopted or KinGAPAdopted or participated in KinGAP after turning 16	15.5 to 23	Chafee

Solutions to Assist Youth in Getting Behind the Wheel

Documents – To get a learner's permit or driver's license the Department of Motor Vehicles requires one proof of identity, one proof of legal presence, and two proofs of their Virginia address (originals, not copies).

Solutions:

- Request at least two birth certificates when obtaining personal documents for all youth in foster care, especially when the birth certificate is issued by another state.
- Assist the youth in obtaining or updating their DMV Identification Card at the age of 15 as it will assist in establishing proof of residence.
- Mailing items (such as Transition Plans, notice of court hearings, birthday cards, etc.) to the youth in their new placements will assist in providing proof of their address.
- Drafting a quick letter on LDSS Letterhead to inform youth of their benefits with their name and address listed will serve as proof of address without being mailed, as long as it does not “Certify”. *The letter certifying the youth’s foster care status will not be accepted without being mailed due to the language of “certification.”*

Knowledge Exam - The Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) reports that about 50% of the teens who take the Knowledge Exam do not pass it on their first try. The logistics of bringing the youth back to the DMV to re-take the test is difficult. Additionally, DMV requires that a youth who fails the Knowledge Exam 3 times complete an 8-hour Driver's Manual Course successfully before they can take the examination a fourth time.

Solutions - Have the youth complete driver's education through their high school or a private driving school as soon as possible (15.5 years old). Driver's education includes a classroom session to review the information tested in the Knowledge Exam, increasing the chances the youth will pass the exam the first time. Youth do not have to have a learner's permit to take drivers education, but they will need to have their learner's permit before the behind the wheel section. Many private driving schools offer the classroom section of driver's education online.

Guided Practice - Virginia law requires that youth under 18 complete 45 hours of guided practice with an adult over the age of 21 (15 hours of which are after sunset). Some foster parents hesitate to have a new driver behind the wheel when they are liable if an accident occurs. Group home policies may restrict youth from using their business vehicle, and staff cannot ride with the youth in a personal car due to workman's compensation liability. Also, the youth's legal guardian who drives a county/city owned car prohibits unauthorized drivers.

Solutions - If a foster parent is hesitant, the LDSS can pay for 10 hours of guided practice through a driving school, so the youth have enough skills to put the parent at ease to continue their training. Drive to Thrive can offer reimbursement for the cost of a deductible if the youth is at fault for damages. Once a youth has a driver's license, funds can cover the increase in their foster parent's auto insurance rates when the youth is added to the policy. Youth in group homes can attend private driving schools able to give the youth the full 45 hours of guided practice.

No access to a "street legal" (titled, registered, insured) car - To complete the road skills test at DMV, a street legal vehicle needs to be provided by the applicant. Insurance is required for a vehicle to be street legal, but to get insurance a driver's license is needed. Therefore, a youth without someone to let them use a car to complete this portion of the licensing process is a significant barrier to the licensing process. A youth cannot purchase a vehicle as a strategy to obtain a driver's license.

Solutions:

- A foster parent, friend or mentor willing to let a youth learn to drive their vehicle is extremely beneficial.
- Several private driving schools are willing to let a student use their vehicles to pass the Skills Test at the DMV.
- Individuals over the age of 18 can get a Skills Test Waiver Form from some Private Driving Schools after 7 hours of Behind the Wheel Lessons. When the youth is successful in getting the waiver, they simply need to bring their person documents, proof they passed driver's education and the signed waiver to the DMV, and they will be issued the driver's license.

Learning to Drive without a vehicle to use: It is common for a youth to turn 18 years old without ever sitting in the driver's seat. Limited access to vehicles often stems from restrictions on driving agency and provider vehicles and the hesitancy from foster parents or mentors to allow youth to drive their personal vehicle. This lack of opportunity makes learning to drive challenging.

For individuals over 18, Virginia requires holding a learner's permit for at least 60 days or completing a driver's education course before taking the DMV road skills test. Those who have not had the chance to practice driving often struggle to pass the skills test and experience issues getting their driver's license.

Solutions – Youth often rely on a foster parent, friend or mentor willing to teach them to drive and use their vehicle for the skills test at the DMV. There are private drivers' education schools willing to work with youth for months to get them the skills to drive on their own safely.

Individuals can drive a moped if they are over the age of 16 with an ID and helmet. mopeds do require registration to be street legal, but insurance is not required. Youth will be able to gain experience driving on roadways while being able to transport themselves to work or school.

This is a short-term solution to assist youth's comfort and skill in driving on the road. A moped is a small motorized (50 cc/1500 watts or less) vehicle that can be powered by pedals or an engine (electric or gas). Youth do not need a driver's license, insurance, or safety inspection. Moped (max speed of 35 mph) cannot be driven on the interstate as they do not meet the minimum speed limit.

Automobile Insurance - In almost every circumstance, a person with a driver's license is required to have auto insurance. There are currently at least three accessible ways this can be accomplished in Virginia:

- 1) If a licensed youth lives in a foster or kinship home, they are automatically covered on the household's automobile insurance policy as a "resident relative". The increase to the caregiver's auto insurance policy can be reimbursed to them.
- 2) If a youth lives in a foster or kinship home and the caregiver is unable or unwilling to add the youth to their policy, the youth can attempt to obtain their own automobile insurance policy. Youth who own a car can have their own insurance policy. If they do not own a car, they would get a "non-named owner policy" which would be added insurance (pays out after the vehicle's insurance pays out) in case of an accident.
- 3) If a youth lives in a congregate care setting and does not own a car, the youth can attempt to obtain their own "non-owners policy," which is likely a requirement of the insurance policy of the group home.

Solutions – It is cheaper to cover a young driver on another policy with established drivers. Funds will cover the increase to the policy if a caregiver chooses to add the youth. If a youth can obtain their own policy, Drive to Thrive and Chafee funds will cover the cost of the policy for six months each year. The second half of the year the insurance policy will need to be the responsibility of the youth.

Insurance covering a youth no longer in the household - If a youth in care leaves the foster parent's home, the foster family must prove that the youth is no longer a resident of their household. This has been challenging for some families in the past. Additionally, it is not uncommon for youth in foster care to move frequently, presenting additional barriers if insurance is involved. The policies would have to be changed each time the youth move as they are based on their address.

Solutions – One way to get the youth off a foster family's insurance is to have the youth change the address on their driver's license. Changing addresses on a driver's license can become a tedious task for an individual who moves often. Some families have had success with providing a letter from their foster care worker stating the youth is no longer part of the family and proof the youth have another insurance policy.

Failure to add a driver to insurance policies – If a foster family does not add a foster child living with them at the time they apply for insurance, one of two actions will take place. The policy could be voided for “material misrepresentation” once the company discovered the insured’s failure to disclose this resident. The company finds out about the youth after an accident; they can retroactively issue rates for this person going back to the date they became a member of the household.

Solutions – Notify the insurance company as soon a new driver joins the household. Even in situations in which a family does not intend to let a youth drive their vehicle. There are endorsements that can be added to a policy in which negates the coverage of a driver for a vehicle. In situations in which a driver is in an accident while driving a vehicle they were not covered on; insurance will not pay out. For example, Sally is a licensed driver and goes to live with the Smiths. The Smiths inform their insurance company Sally is a resident of their home, but she is not allowed to drive their vehicles. If Sally moves the vehicle in the driveway one day with the Smith’s permission and runs into something, insurance will not pay for the damage.

Barriers without Solutions

Driver's Education & Road Skills Courses - Everyone in Virginia must complete Driver’s education course through their high school or a private driving school. This course consists of 36 classroom periods, 14 in-car instruction periods (aka Behind the Wheel). In addition, 45 hours of "guided practice" with a licensed driver (age 21+) and the final Road Skills Examination.

After holding a learner’s permit for nine (9) months (under the age of 18) or 2 months (over the age of 18), these driving requirements have been met, and the youth is at least 16 years and 3 months old, an application can be completed at the DMV to get a driver’s license. It is extremely difficult for a youth to get a driver’s license if there is no drivers' education in high school or a private driving school in the community.

***The information in this document is provided as a guide only and may not cover all driving and transportation questions or concerns. For specific questions, the local department of social services may need to seek advice from the DMV, insurance companies, or experts in the field. Also, the information in this document may change due to new laws, policies, and regulations. If there are questions about the Virginia’s Drive to Thrive Program, please email them to VDSS Youth Services at va.ilp@dss.virginia.gov.

 [**www.fostermifutures.com**](http://www.fostermifutures.com)

 [**va.ilp@dss.virginia.gov**](mailto:va.ilp@dss.virginia.gov)

 [**FUSION-Services For Youth and Young Adults**](#)