

HOUSE BILL REPORT

E2SHB 2046

As Amended by the Senate

Title: An act relating to foster care.

Brief Description: Creating foster parent liaison positions.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Cooke, Kessler and Boldt).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Children & Family Services: 2/25/97, 2/28/97 [DPS];
Appropriations: 3/8/97 [DP2S(w/o sub CFS)].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/15/97, 96-0.
Senate Amended.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Cooke, Chairman; Boldt, Vice Chairman; Bush, Vice Chairman; Tokuda, Ranking Minority Member; Kastama, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Ballasiotes; Carrell; Dickerson; Gombosky; McDonald and Wolfe.

Staff: David Knutson (786-7146).

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The second substitute bill be substituted therefor and the second substitute bill do pass and do not pass the substitute bill by Committee on Children & Family Services. Signed by 31 members: Representatives Huff, Chairman; Alexander, Vice Chairman; Clements, Vice Chairman; Wensman, Vice Chairman; H. Sommers, Ranking Minority Member; Doumit, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Gombosky, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Benson; Carlson; Chopp; Cody; Cooke; Crouse; Dyer; Grant; Keiser; Kenney; Kessler; Lambert; Linville;

Lisk; Mastin; McMorris; Parlette; Poulsen; Regala; D. Schmidt; Sehlin; Sheahan; Talcott and Tokuda.

Staff: Jason Hall (786-7145).

Background: Under existing law, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) is required to develop a recruiting plan for an adequate number of foster and adoptive homes and submit the plan annually to the appropriate committees of the Legislature. The report must include a section on foster care turnover, causes, and recommendations. High turnover of foster parents is attributed to poor working relationships between foster parents and department case workers. The department is also required to monitor out-of-home placements and report the results of its monitoring to appropriate legislative committees on an annual basis. Foster parents are considered part of a professional foster care team serving dependent children, but the department does not provide child care when foster parents are required to attend meetings outside the home.

Summary of Bill: The DSHS will contract with a private agency to recruit an adequate number of prospective adoptive and foster homes. The department will contract with a private agency for a foster parent liaison position in each departmental region. The foster parent liaison will reduce foster parent turnover by 20 percent. The department will provide foster parents who are required to attend training, meetings, and other official functions with child care. The department will provide a foster care passport for each foster child entering care after the effective date of the legislation. The department will share information on foster children with the foster parent caring for the child. The foster parent will keep the information confidential. The bill will be null and void if it is not referenced in the operating budget by June 30, 1997

EFFECT OF SENATE AMENDMENT(S): The annual report to the Governor and the Legislature is expanded to include reports on the success of the department in completing home studies, reducing the foster parent turnover rate, and implementing and operating the passport program.

The requirement for the foster parent liaison to reduce the foster parent turnover rate by 20 percent was removed and replaced by a requirement that the contract with the liaison specify the percentage of reduction expected. Performance of this requirement will be evaluated when extending or renewing the contract.

The home studies contracted for are for legally free children who have been awaiting adoption finalization for more than 90 days. The home studies selected are for the children awaiting adoption finalization for the longest period of time.

The passport program is limited to children who have been in foster care for 90 consecutive days or more. However, the foster parents are to be notified before placement of any known health conditions that pose a serious threat to the child and any know behavioral history that presents a serious threat to the child or others.

The reduction in force triggered by a failure to fully implement the passport program is removed and replaced by an annual reporting requirement.

The department has the option of providing child care to foster parents required to attend department-sponsored meetings or training sessions. If it is not provided, the department, where feasible, must conduct these activities in the foster parent's home or other location acceptable to the foster parent.

The provisions in the bill shall be provided within available resources. The null and void clause is eliminated.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect on July 1, 1997.

Testimony For (Human Services & Corrections): The foster care system should be more user-friendly for foster parents. The liaison positions in the bill are needed as an independent source of information for foster parents. The liaisons can also work problems out with the department and reduce frustrations of foster parents. Recruitment efforts will bring in needed new foster parents. It is difficult to recruit foster and adoptive parents for older children.

The passport program is needed for every child in foster care. Especially important is immediate access to information about serious health conditions affecting a foster child.

Obtaining child care in order to attend mandatory meetings and training is difficult for some foster parents, particularly those with special needs children.

Testimony Against (Human Services & Corrections): None.

Testified (Human Services & Corrections): PRO: Robert Ott, FPAWS; Alan Willoughby, foster parent; Darlene Flowers, FPAWS; Marie Jamieson, Families for Kids; David Robinson; Robert Good; Sue Batson; Margaret Casey, WSCC; Laurie Lippold, CHS; Jennifer Strus, DSHS.

Testimony For (Ways & Means): The bill contains provisions to address the shortage of foster care placements, including placements for teens and children with behavioral and medical problems. The passport program provides that information will be collected and presented to foster parents, which is needed given the level of medications taken by foster children. The bill will help children be adopted by allowing for the contracting of home studies for adoptive families. Many children are waiting for a home study to be completed so they can be adopted. Foster parent liaisons help keep foster parents in the system.

Testimony Against (Ways & Means): None.

Testified (Ways & Means): Rep. Suzette Cooke, prime sponsor; Laurie Lippold, Children's Home Society; Margaret Casey, Washington State Catholic Conference; Darlene Flowers, Foster Parent Association of Washington.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect on July 1, 1997. However, sections 2, 3, and 4 are null and void unless funded in the budget.

Testimony For: (Children & Family Services) Child placing agencies are in danger of going out of business unless the rate paid by the DSHS is increased. Foster parents stop providing care for foster children because of frustrations in dealing with department case workers. They need a liaison to improve working relationships with their case worker and the department. Children are placed in foster homes by the department without any information on their medical, emotional, mental, or physical condition. This can pose a danger to the foster parents and their families. It can also jeopardize the health and (Appropriations) This bill is the result of several working groups and brings Washington up to the level of support for foster parents advocated by several studies. This bill helps to alleviate some of the huge burdens on foster parents and provides them with critical information and support. This legislation is good because it states the actual costs and recognizes the real costs incurred by child-placing agencies.
welfare of the foster child.

Testimony Against: (Children & Family Services) None presented.

(Appropriations) None.

Testified: (Children & Family Services) Marie Jamieson, Families for Kids (pro); Josephine Tamayo-Murray, Catholic Community Services of King County (pro); Hannah Bigby, adoptee (pro); David Robinson, adoptive parent (pro); Robert Ott,

Foster Parents Association of Washington (pro); Darlene Flowers, Foster Parents Association of Washington (pro); Jennifer Strus, Department of Social and Health Services (with concerns); Kathie Costanich, foster parent (pro); Sue Batson, foster parent (pro); and Alan Willoughby, foster parent (pro).

(Appropriations) Laurie Lippold, Children's Home Society; Margaret Casey, Washington State Catholic Conference; and Jennifer Strus, Department of Social and Health Services.