

HOUSE BILL ANALYSIS

SB 6168

Title: An act relating to the department of social and health services phone answering system.

Brief Description: Requiring the department of social and health services to have a phone system that facilitates access to a departmental employee rather than voice mail.

Sponsors: Senators Fairley, Patterson and Kline.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

Meeting Date: February 17, 2000.

Bill Analysis Prepared by: Deborah Frazier (786-7152).

Background: Frustrations have been expressed about the use of automated telephone systems by businesses and governments. Customers and taxpayers find that they must listen to lists of options for directing their call, and, that these options may not include the option to speak with a person.

Workgroups addressing issues with services provided by the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) have also heard these complaints. The department uses a telephone system that relies upon automated services.

Summary of Bill: The DSHS is prohibited from using an automated telephone system for its primary public service numbers unless, during regular business hours, the first menu option allows direct access to an employee. Calls to the primary public service numbers must be answered promptly. The department must monitor response time in an effort to limit hold time to five minutes or less.

No employee may use an automated telephone system to screen calls for the purpose of refusing to communicate with any person who is calling to discuss job related duties.

The Department of General Administration must ensure that each division and unit of the DSHS establishes procedures for answering telephone calls placed during regular business hours that conform to the requirements of the statute.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.