

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1512

As Reported By House Committee On:
Human Services

Title: An act relating to dependent children.

Brief Description: Changing provisions relating to dependent children.

Sponsors: Representatives Brough, Leonard, Chappell, Romero, Veloria, Riley, Karahalios, Horn, Wolfe, Ballasiotes, Talcott, G. Cole, Flemming and J. Kohl.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Human Services, March 1, 1993, DPS.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Leonard, Chair; Riley, Vice Chair; Cooke, Ranking Minority Member; Talcott, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Brown; Karahalios; Lisk; Patterson; Thibaudeau; and Wolfe.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Padden.

Staff: David Knutson (786-7146).

Background: When a child is found by the court to be dependent because of abuse, neglect, or a parent's inability to care for the child, he or she is often placed in foster care. For many children, their stay in foster care can last for years as their parents attempt to improve the deficiency which led the court to take their child away. The current process for terminating a parent and child relationship can take years, denying the child a permanent home or setting.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The list of aggravated circumstances the court must consider in determining whether to terminate the parent and child relationship is expanded to include; (1) use of intoxicating or controlled substances which render the parent incapable of properly caring for the child, (2) psychological incapacity or mental deficiency of the parent which renders the parent incapable of properly

caring for the child, and (3) severe abuse of a child under five. The agency having custody of a dependent child shall prepare a permanency plan and present it to the court between the 15th and 18th month of placement. The court is required to accept the permanency plan prepared by the agency. A petition seeking to terminate the parent and child relationship may be based on a parent's failure to substantially improve the parental deficiency within 12 months, leading to a presumption that it is unlikely the condition will be remedied, allowing the child to return home.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The judge will not consider a parent's documented failure to complete multiple treatment in determining whether to terminate a parent-child relationship. The aggravated circumstance related to the age of a child who has suffered severe abuse is increased from five to 13.

Fiscal Note: Requested.

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

Testimony For: When parents are clearly incapable of correcting the problems which caused their child to be found dependent, the state should move deliberately to find a permanent home for the child. Many children stay in foster care too long because the state and the court are reluctant to terminate the parent-child relationship.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: Darlene Flowers, Foster Parent Association of Washington State; Karl Jensen, foster parent; and Gerard Sidorowicz, Department of Social and Health Services.