

FINAL BILL REPORT

2SHB 2856

C 131 L 96

Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Establishing the office of the child, youth, and family ombudsman.

Sponsors: Representatives Cooke, D. Schmidt, Wolfe, Reams, Tokuda, Chopp, Stevens, Costa, Mulliken, Hymes, Hatfield, Silver, Scheuerman, Kessler, Conway and Cole; by request of Governor Lowry.

House Committee on Children & Family Services

House Committee on Appropriations

Senate Committee on Human Services & Corrections

Senate Committee on Ways & Means

Background: In September 1995, the Governor convened a child protection roundtable to advise him on the problems related to protecting children. One of the roundtable's recommended options for increasing the safety of children and for improving the effectiveness of the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) was the creation of an independent ombudsman. The ombudsman's duties would be to identify problems in the child protection and welfare system and to assist children, youth, and families who are experiencing problems with DSHS or state-licensed facilities.

Several other states have established an ombudsman office to address issues related to state services for children and families. Washington State has created other ombudsman offices to provide assistance in issues related to long-term care, small businesses, and mobile home parks.

Summary: The Office of Children, Youth and Family Ombudsman is established in the Office of the Governor. The purpose of the ombudsman is to monitor and ensure that DSHS and state-licensed facilities comply with statutory requirements relating to children and families.

The ombudsman's specific duties include providing to the public information relating to children and family services, investigating cases involving DSHS or state-licensed agencies, monitoring DSHS practices and procedures, conducting periodic review of all state institutions and licensed facilities, reviewing investigative reports of children who die while receiving DSHS services, and recruiting and training volunteers to assist the ombudsman. The ombudsman is appointed by the Governor for a three-year term. The ombudsman must report to the Governor and Legislature annually.

The ombudsman's investigations and records are confidential and may be disclosed only as necessary to perform his or her duties.

A legislative children's oversight committee is created to monitor and ensure compliance with administrative acts, relevant statutes, rules, and policies pertaining to family and children services and the placement, supervision, and treatment of children in the state's care.

Votes on Final Passage:

House	97	0	
Senate	49	0	(Senate amended)
House	97	0	(House concurred)

Effective: June 6, 1996
March 21, 1996 (Sections 1-3)