

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5512

As Reported By House Committee On:
Children & Family Services

Title: An act relating to admittance of guilt in child abuse and neglect.

Brief Description: Prohibiting requiring the admission of guilt to receive treatment in child abuse and neglect.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Human Services & Corrections (originally sponsored by Senators Stevens, Hargrove, Benton, Haugen, Strannigan, Hochstatter, Rasmussen, Schow and Oke).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Children & Family Services: 4/1/97, 4/3/97 [DPA].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. 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: Douglas Ruth (786-7134).

Background: In a dependency proceeding, a court may order a parent who has physically or sexually abused his or her child to temporarily leave the home. The parent must complete treatment and education for abusive behavior before a court may allow the parent to return home. The court may also require the parent to continue treatment as a condition of remaining in the home.

Summary of Amended Bill: A parent does not need to admit guilt to enter into treatment or education ordered by a court unless the parent is found guilty in a criminal proceeding of the acts that are the subject of the dependency action.

Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill: The amended version of the bill permits individuals to begin treatment without admission of guilt.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: Because many parents cannot afford private treatment programs, they must participate in state-paid programs that require admission of guilt as part of treatment. As a result, parents are almost blackmailed– into making admissions that may be used against them later.

Testimony Against: Treatment for abusive behavior or sexually deviant behavior cannot begin until the parent owns up to his or her actions. A person who continues to deny totally that he or she acted wrongly is not a treatment candidate. Treatment is not complete until the person acknowledges that his or her actions were wrong. Whether someone acted wrongly or needs treatment is another issue that is not addressed by the bill. However, if there is a legitimate need, acknowledgment of a behavioral problem is essential to successful treatment of the parent. The bill would reunite parents and children, although the parents may still have behavior difficulties that place the children at risk.

Testified: Senator Val Stevens, prime sponsor; Joan Storkman, citizen (comments); Lori Delaney, Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs (con); and Michael Barsanti, Washington Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (con).