

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1862

As Reported By House Committee On:
Children & Family Services
Appropriations

Title: An act relating to community-based alternative response systems.

Brief Description: Requiring a community-based response system for certain families referred to child protective services.

Sponsors: Representatives Cooke, Dickerson, Boldt and McDonald.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Children & Family Services: 2/21/97, 2/28/97 [DPS];

Appropriations: 3/8/97 [DP2S(w/o sub CFS)].

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).

Background: The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) uses a risk assessment matrix for screening reports of child abuse and neglect. The risk assessment matrix uses a five point scale for ranking reports. A score of five is the most serious report; a score of one, the least important. The department currently screens out reports with a score of three or lower. Screened-out cases do not typically receive services from the department. In some limited areas, the department does offer services to families that are screened-out.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The DSHS will create a community-based alternative response system for low-risk families who are screened-out by the risk assessment process. Services will be provided through contracts with community-based organizations.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The DSHS is provided greater flexibility in determining which cases will be referred to a community alternative response program.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: Other states have instituted alternative response systems for low-risk child abuse referrals and have reduced further abuse. This is a cost-effective targeted prevention strategy.

Testimony Against: None presented.

Testified: Priscilla Martens, Behavioral Sciences Institute (pro); Seth Dawson, Common Ground for Children (pro); Elmira Forner, Catholic Community Services (pro); Alice Probert, Catholic Community Services (pro); and Janet Hedgepath, Catholic Community Services (pro).

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).

Summary of Recommendation of Committee on Appropriations Compared to Recommendation of Committee on Children & Family Services: The second substitute bill makes the creation of community-based alternative response systems permissive rather than mandatory.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: This bill will cover low-risk cases that often deteriorate and enter the child protective services (CPS) system later with a higher cost attached. The bill also reduces the number of re-referrals to CPS for suspected abuse or neglect. This is modeled on the South King County program which is successful. It is a small price to pay for extension of the program statewide.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Representative Suzette Cooke, prime sponsor; Margaret Casey, Washington State Catholic Conference; and Jennifer Strus, Department of Social and Health Services.