

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2046

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

Title: An act relating to foster care.

Brief Description: Creating foster parent liaison positions.

Sponsors: Representatives Cooke, Kessler and Boldt.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Children & Family Services: 2/25/97, 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: Under existing law, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) is required to develop a recruiting plan for an adequate number of foster and adoptive homes and submit the plan annually to the appropriate committees of the Legislature. The report must include a section on foster care turnover, causes, and recommendations. High turnover of foster parents is attributed to poor working relationships between foster parents and department case workers. The department is also required to monitor out-of-home placements and report the results of its monitoring to appropriate legislative committees on an annual basis. The department does not reimburse child-placing agencies for their actual costs in caring for children referred by the department. Agency reimbursement rates are based on historical amounts that are periodically adjusted by the Legislature. Foster parents are considered part of a professional foster care team serving dependent children, but the department does not provide child care when foster parents are required to attend meetings outside the home.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The DSHS will recruit an adequate number of prospective adoptive and foster homes and report their success in achieving the goal. The department will provide a foster parent liaison position in each departmental region. The foster parent liaison will reduce foster parent turnover by 20 percent. The department will provide an additional 200 adoptive and foster home placements by June 30, 1998. The department will increase reimbursement rates to child-placing agencies and require increased performance outcomes. The department will provide foster parents who are required to attend training, meetings, and other official functions with child care. The department will provide a foster care passport for each foster child entering care after the effective date of the legislation. The department will share information on foster children with the foster parent caring for the child. The foster parent will keep the information confidential.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The foster parent liaison function will be provided through contract with a private nonprofit agency. The department will implement a passport containing all known and available information on foster children placed after the effective date of the legislation. The department will share information related to the foster child with the foster parent caring for the child. The null and void clause is applied to three specific sections of the legislation.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect on July 1, 1997. However, sections 2, 3, and 4 are null and void unless funded in the budget.

Testimony For: Child placing agencies are in danger of going out of business unless the rate paid by the DSHS is increased. Foster parents stop providing care for foster children because of frustrations in dealing with department case workers. They need a liaison to improve working relationships with their case worker and the department. Children are placed in foster homes by the department without any information on their medical, emotional, mental, or physical condition. This can pose a danger to the foster parents and their families. It can also jeopardize the health and welfare of the foster child.

Testimony Against: None presented.

Testified: Marie Jamieson, Families for Kids (pro); Josephine Tamayo-Murray, Catholic Community Services of King County (pro); Hannah Bigby, adoptee (pro); David Robinson, adoptive parent (pro); Robert Ott, Foster Parents Association of Washington (pro); Darlene Flowers, Foster Parents Association of Washington (pro); Jennifer Strus, Department of Social and Health Services (with concerns); Kathie

Costanich, foster parent (pro); Sue Batson, foster parent (pro); and Alan Willoughby, foster parent (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 requires that the recruitment program enacted by the bill be administered by a private agency through a contract with DSHS. It deletes the requirement that child-placing agencies receive a rate increase and removes all references to this deleted section.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect on July 1, 1997. However, sections 2, 3 and 4 are null and void unless funded in the budget.

Testimony For: This bill is the result of several working groups and brings Washington up to the level of support for foster parents advocated by several studies. This bill helps to alleviate some of the huge burdens on foster parents and provides them with critical information and support. This legislation is good because it states the actual costs and recognizes the real costs incurred by child-placing agencies.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Laurie Lippold, Children's Home Society; Margaret Casey, Washington State Catholic Conference; and Jennifer Strus, Department of Social and Health Services.