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## Children & Family Services Committee

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### BILL ANALYSIS HB 3103

**Title:** An act relating to prenatal newborn screening for exposure to harmful drugs.

**Brief Description:** Requiring newborn screening for exposure to harmful drugs.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Dickerson and Cooke.

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**Meeting Date:** February 3, 1998.

**Bill Analysis Prepared by:** Douglas Ruth (786-7134).

**Background:** A 1990 GAO report to the U.S. Senate Committee on Finance concluded that identifying infants who have been prenatally exposed to drugs is the key to providing them with effective medical and social interventions at birth and as they grow up.— The report went on to state that many health professionals believe early risk assessment and comprehensive residential drug treatment that includes prenatal care services the best approach to... providing the developing infant with the best chance of being born healthy.—

Many hospitals do not conduct assessments for drug use during pregnancy. Some do not screen infants to determine if they are drug-affected. Hospitals that do screen use varying protocols. The GAO report found a wide range of hospital practices. A GAO survey of hospitals also showed that the more rigorous a protocol used, the greater the number of drug-exposed infants identified. In some cases, the number was five times greater.

A uniform procedure for testing or screening does not exist. Identifying drug-affected babies can be difficult, especially identifying babies suffering from fetal alcohol syndrome. However, the type of screening used by hospitals is significant in determining the number of drug-affected babies identified. Since many drug-exposed infants display few overt withdrawal signs and many women deny using drugs out of fear of being incarcerated or losing their child, simple screening protocols may not detect all the infants needing special care.

**Summary of Bill:** The department of health is directed to consult with medical professionals to develop a screening criteria to use in identifying pregnant women who are at risk of conceiving a drug-affected baby. Similarly, the department of health will develop training protocols to instruct personnel to use the identification and screening protocols.

The department of health shall also investigate the feasibility of protocols for testing or screening of newborns for drug or alcohol exposure. The department shall consider how to improve the current testing practices.

The department of health will report its findings to the legislature by December 1, 1998.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** None requested.

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

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