

SENATE BILL REPORT

E2SHB 2046

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Human Services & Corrections, April 2, 1997
Ways & Means, April 7, 1997

Title: An act relating to foster care.

Brief Description: Creating foster parent liaison positions.

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Cooke, Kessler and Boldt).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections: 3/25/97, 4/2/97 [DPA-WM].
Ways & Means: 4/7/97 [DPA].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.
Signed by Senators Long, Chair; Zarelli, Vice Chair; Franklin, Hargrove, Kohl, Schow and Stevens.

Staff: Kyle Thiessen (786-7754)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended.
Signed by Senators West, Chair; Strannigan, Vice Chair; Bauer, Brown, Fraser, Kohl, Long, McDonald, Roach, Rossi, Snyder, Spanel, Swecker, Winsley and Zarelli.

Staff: Susan Lucas (786-7711)

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. 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.

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 Amended Bill: DSHS must recruit an adequate number of prospective adoptive and foster homes and report its success in achieving the goal. The department must

provide a foster parent liaison position in each departmental region. The foster parent liaison must substantially reduce the foster parent turnover rate. The department must increase the number of adoptive and foster families through an intensive recruitment program. A private agency must coordinate recruitment activities. The department may purchase services from nonprofit agencies for the purpose of conducting home studies for children who have been awaiting adoption in foster care. The department must provide child care to foster parents who are required to attend meetings, or training sessions, where feasible.

The department must provide a foster care passport for each foster child care for 90 days or more. Foster parents must be given information about serious health conditions or behavior problems before placement. The department must share information about the foster child with the foster parent caring for the child. The foster parent must keep the information confidential.

These activities shall be provided within available resources.

Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill: The annual report to the Governor and the Legislature is expanded to include reports on the success of the department in completing home studies, reducing the foster parent turnover rate, and implementing and operating the passport program.

The requirement for the foster parent liaison to reduce the foster parent turnover rate by 20 percent was removed and replaced by a requirement that the contract with the liaison specify the percentage of reduction expected. Performance of this requirement will be evaluated when extending or renewing the contract.

The home studies contracted for are for legally free children who have been awaiting adoption finalization for more than 90 days. The home studies selected are for the children awaiting adoption finalization for the longest period of time.

The passport program is limited to children who have been in foster care for 90 consecutive days or more. However, the foster parents are to be notified before placement of any known health conditions that pose a serious threat to the child and any known behavioral history that presents a serious threat to the child or others.

The reduction in force triggered by a failure to fully implement the passport program is removed and replaced by the annual reporting requirements added to section 1.

The department has the option of providing child care to foster parents required to attend department-sponsored meetings or training sessions. If it is not provided, the department, where feasible, must conduct these activities in the foster parent's home or other location acceptable to the foster parent.

Ways & Means Amended Bill Compared to Human Services & Corrections Amended Bill: The provisions in the bill shall be provided within available resources. The null and void clause is eliminated.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For (Human Services & Corrections): The foster care system should be more user-friendly for foster parents. The liaison positions in the bill are needed as an independent source of information for foster parents. The liaisons can also work problems out with the department and reduce frustrations of foster parents. Recruitment efforts will bring in needed new foster parents. It is difficult to recruit foster and adoptive parents for older children.

The passport program is needed for every child in foster care. Especially important is immediate access to information about serious health conditions affecting a foster child.

Obtaining child care in order to attend mandatory meetings and training is difficult for some foster parents, particularly those with special needs children.

Testimony Against (Human Services & Corrections): None.

Testified (Human Services & Corrections): PRO: Robert Ott, FPAWS; Alan Willoubilby, foster parent; Darlene Flowers, FPAWS; Marie Jamieson, Families for Kids; David Robinson; Robert Good; Sue Batson; Margaret Casey, WSCC; Laurie Lippold, CHS; Jennifer Strus, DSHS.

Testimony For (Ways & Means): The bill contains provisions to address the shortage of foster care placements, including placements for teens and children with behavioral and medical problems. The passport program provides that information will be collected and presented to foster parents, which is needed given the level of medications taken by foster children. The bill will help children be adopted by allowing for the contracting of home studies for adoptive families. Many children are waiting for a home study to be completed so they can be adopted. Foster parent liaisons help keep foster parents in the system.

Testimony Against (Ways & Means): None.

Testified (Ways & Means): Rep. Suzette Cooke, prime sponsor; Laurie Lippold, Children's Home Society; Margaret Casey, Washington State Catholic Conference; Darlene Flowers, Foster Parent Association of Washington.