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HOUSE BILL 2686

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State of Washington                      55th Legislature                      1998 Regular Session

By Representatives Lambert, Costa, O'Brien and Wolfe

Read first time 01/16/98. Referred to Committee on Law & Justice.

1            AN ACT Relating to the creation of a unified court-family; and  
2 adding a new chapter to Title 2 RCW.

3 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

4            NEW SECTION.    **Sec. 1.** The legislature recognizes the increasing  
5 incidence of concurrent involvement of family members in multiple areas  
6 of the justice system. Analysis shows significant case overlap in the  
7 case types of juvenile offender, juvenile dependency, domestic  
8 violence, and domestic relations. It is believed that in such  
9 situations, an efficient and effective response is through creation of  
10 a unified court system centered around the family that: Provides a  
11 dedicated, trained, and informed judiciary; incorporates case  
12 management practices based on a family's judicial system needs; enables  
13 multiple case type resolution by one judicial officer or judicial team;  
14 provides coordinated legal services; and considers and evaluates the  
15 needs of the family as a whole.

16            NEW SECTION.    **Sec. 2.** The administrator for the courts shall  
17 conduct a unified court-family pilot program.

1 (1) Pilot program sites shall be selected through a request for  
2 proposal process and using the following criteria:

3 (a) Program sites shall be established in no fewer than three  
4 superior court judicial districts;

5 (b) Program sites shall only be located in superior court judicial  
6 districts with a statutorily authorized judicial complement of no fewer  
7 than five judges;

8 (c) At least one program site shall be located in a superior court  
9 in eastern Washington;

10 (d) At least one program site shall be located in a superior court  
11 judicial district where the judicial complement is fewer than the  
12 number of judges authorized by statute.

13 (2) The administrator for the courts shall develop criteria for the  
14 unified court-family pilot program that shall include, but not be  
15 limited to, the following criteria:

16 (a) At a minimum, unified court-family pilot programs shall include  
17 all case types under Title 13 RCW, chapters 26.12, 26.50, and 28A.225  
18 RCW, and adult criminal cases of persons who have family members with  
19 matters before the unified court-family;

20 (b) Unified court-family judicial officers shall volunteer for the  
21 program, serve a minimum term of two years, and complete mandatory  
22 training requirements as established by local court rule;

23 (c) Case management practices shall provide a flexible response to  
24 the diverse court-related needs of families involved in multiple areas  
25 of the justice system. Case management practices should result in a  
26 reduction in process redundancies and an efficient use of time and  
27 resources, and create a system enabling multiple case type resolution  
28 by one judicial officer or judicial team;

29 (d) A court facilitator to provide assistance to parties with  
30 matters before the unified court-family; and

31 (e) An emphasis on providing nonadversarial methods of dispute  
32 resolution.

33 (3) The office of the administrator for the courts shall provide to  
34 the judicial districts selected for the pilot program the computer  
35 resources needed by each judicial district to implement the unified  
36 court-family pilot program.

37 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** The judges of the superior court judicial  
38 districts with unified court-family pilot programs shall adopt local

1 court rules directing the program. The local court rules shall comply  
2 with the criteria established by the administrator for the courts and  
3 shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

4 (1) All judicial officers hearing cases in unified court-family  
5 shall:

6 (a) Complete an initial mandatory training program including the  
7 topic areas of early childhood development, domestic violence, cultural  
8 sensitivity, child abuse and neglect, chemical dependency, and mental  
9 health;

10 (b) Annually attend a minimum of eight hours of continuing  
11 education of pertinence to the unified court-family, subsequent to the  
12 initial mandatory training; and

13 (c) Have at least five years of applicable experience.

14 Time spent meeting the judicial training requirements of the  
15 unified court-family shall be considered in-service and not deducted  
16 from the judicial participant's other judicial education time  
17 allotments or vacation time;

18 (2) Case management based on the practice of one judge or judicial  
19 team to handle all matters relating to a family;

20 (3) To the extent possible, coordination and consolidation of all  
21 cases before the unified court-family relating to a family;

22 (4) Mandatory collection and reporting of information specified by  
23 the administrator for the courts to the Washington state institute for  
24 public policy; and

25 (5) Record confidentiality that protects the confidentiality of  
26 court records in accordance with the law but that ensures law  
27 enforcement agencies have access to the records to the extent  
28 permissible under the law.

29 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** (1) The legislature finds that it is  
30 critical to evaluate the effectiveness of the pilot projects for  
31 purposes of measuring improvements in the judicial system's response to  
32 family involvement. To accomplish this evaluation, the Washington  
33 state institute for public policy shall conduct a study of the pilot  
34 program in accordance with guidelines and criteria established by the  
35 office of the administrator for the courts.

36 (2) The Washington institute for public policy shall report  
37 preliminary findings and final results of the study to the governor,  
38 the chief justice of the supreme court, and the legislature on a

1 biennial basis. The initial report is due not later than July 1, 2000,  
2 and the final report is due not later than December 1, 2004.

3 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 5.** Sections 1 through 4 of this act constitute  
4 a new chapter in Title 2 RCW.

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