

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1249

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

Title: An act relating to the quality of foster care services.

Brief Description: Regarding the quality of foster care services.

Sponsors: Representatives Kagi, Boldt, Ballasiotes, Tokuda, Dickerson, Gombosky, Darneille, Morell, Anderson, Schual-Berke, Esser, McIntire, Doumit, Kenney, Clements, Edwards, Fromhold, Miloscia, Barlean, Talcott, Ruderman, Conway, Kessler, Ogden, Lovick, D. Schmidt, O'Brien, Edmonds, Wood and Haigh.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Children & Family Services: 1/29/01, 2/8/01 [DPS];
Appropriations: 3/1/01, 3/8/01 [DP2S(w/o sub CFS)].

Brief Summary of Second Substitute Bill

- The Legislature declares support for the Department of Social and Health Services efforts to achieve accreditation for all Children's Administration offices by July 1, 2006.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Boldt, Republican Co-Chair; Tokuda, Democratic Co-Chair; Kagi, Democratic Vice Chair; Morell, Republican Vice Chair; Ballasiotes, Campbell, Darneille, Dickerson, Miloscia and Pflug.

Staff: Deborah Frazier (786-7152).

Background:

The Children's Administration of the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) served over 19,000 children in out-of-home care during fiscal year 2000. Over 6,300 licensed foster homes were available to serve the majority of these children.

A 1999 Foster Care Task Force identified a number of priorities for improving the foster care system. Foster care rates, assessments for children entering foster care, and foster parent recruitment and retention were identified as priorities for immediate action. Restructured rates are being implemented and assessment improvement efforts are underway. Recruitment and retention efforts are ongoing.

Some child welfare practitioners and advocates support accreditation as a means to promote some of the foster care system improvements identified as priorities by the task force, and other system improvements. Accreditation involves self-evaluation and evaluation by an outside entity against performance standards developed nationally.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The bill creates an intent section for the foster care statutes and recodifies existing statutes by placing them in a different order.

The Legislature declares support for the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) efforts to achieve accreditation for all Children's Administration offices by July 1, 2006.

Minimum standards for respite care for foster parents are established at three days per month per family caring for a child longer than 90 days.

The department is instructed to explore proven foster care models and report to the Legislature by December 1, 2001.

A private right of action is not created by the provisions of the bill.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The requirement that respite care providers will be paid directly by the respite care program is removed. The array of new foster care models to be explored is broadened and a reporting requirement is added. The requirement to adopt new models is deleted. A section is added clarifying that a private right of action is not created by the provisions of the bill.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on February 9, 2001.

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

Testimony For: Kids in foster care deserve a fair deal. Children damaged by their own families need intervention and professional help. We have a moral obligation as well as a legal obligation to see that foster children are properly cared for. We need to invest in children's lives; we can pay now, or pay later when these children become adults and end up in the prison system, the mental health system or the welfare system. The department supports the bill and has some suggested language changes that will address concerns.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: (In support) Representative Kagi, prime sponsor; Charellotte Miller, foster youth; Eric Kenezuroff, foster youth; James Williams and Janice Avery, Treehouse; Justice Bobbe Bridge; Danielle Baxter, foster parent; Laurie Lippold, Children's Home Society; Tess Thomas, foster parent, Sandy McAuliff, foster parent; Julie Povick, former foster parent with Lutheran Social Services; Christine Cavanagh, Bethany Christian Services; Pamela Hongel, foster parent with Vancouver Department of Children and Family Services; and Marianna Conner, Washington Department of Social and Health Services.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 31 members: Representatives Sehlin, Republican Co-Chair; H. Sommers, Democratic Co-Chair; Barlean, Republican Vice Chair; Doumit, Democratic Vice Chair; Lisk, Republican Vice Chair; Alexander, Benson, Boldt, Buck, Clements, Cody, Cox, Dunshee, Fromhold, Gombosky, Grant, Kagi, Keiser, Kenney, Kessler, Lambert, Linville, Mastin, Mulliken, Pearson, Pflug, Ruderman, D. Schmidt, Schual-Berke, Talcott and Tokuda.

Staff: Heather Flodstrom (786-7391).

Summary of Recommendation of Committee On Appropriations Compared to Recommendation of Committee On Children & Family Services:

The second substitute bill removes specific strategies regarding accreditation that were included in the substitute bill. It removes the section on respite care specifications and the section that instructs the department to explore proven foster care models from the substitute bill. The sections remaining in the second substitute declare support for the DSHS achieving accreditation in all of their Children's Administration offices.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill

is passed.

Testimony For: (Substitute bill) It is in the state's best interest to do a good job with vulnerable children who are coming out of homes abused and neglected. There is a great deal more to do, and we need a more systemic approach to change the culture of the agency and its relationship to foster parents and foster children is needed. Accreditation will achieve that by allowing the department to change the way it does business to meet national standards. The cost of accreditation won't be known until it begins in the local offices.

Making foster parenting a more professional effort will serve foster children better. Lessening a caseworker's load helps a child tremendously. This bill will be saving money in the long run and will be helping less fortunate children. This legislation will make a difference in the lives of foster children and foster parents by saving lives, saving money because it's an investment in the future, and saving our communities by giving foster children every chance we can, so that they can be productive members of society. Accreditation has worked for non-profits.

The DSHS is committed to the concept of statewide accreditation. Moving to accreditation helps deliver more effective services and improve the quality of care. Respite care is important. The department will try to absorb as much of the administrative costs for accreditation as it can.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Representative Ruth Kagi, prime sponsor; Sandy McAuliffe; Tiffany Feuster; James Williams, Treehouse; Bill Mahler, Children's Home Society; and Rosalyn Dreskovick, Department of Social and Health Services.