

FINAL BILL REPORT

2SHB 3085

C 182 L 04

Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Encouraging the use of family decision meetings regarding children in the child welfare system.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Kagi, Boldt, Dickerson, Orcutt, Shabro, Pettigrew, Darneille and Morrell).

House Committee on Children & Family Services

House Committee on Appropriations

Senate Committee on Children & Family Services & Corrections

Background:

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) is required to provide child welfare services throughout the state. Child welfare services are defined by state law as public social services that, strengthen, supplement, or substitute for parental care and supervision for the purpose of:

- preventing or remedying, or assisting in the solution of, problems that may result in families in conflict, or the neglect, abuse, exploitation, or criminal behavior of children;
- protecting and caring for dependent or neglected children;
- assisting children who are in conflict with their parents, and assisting parents who are in conflict with their children with services designed to resolve those conflicts;
- protecting and promoting the welfare of children, including the strengthening of their own homes where possible or where needed; and
- providing adequate care of children away from their homes in foster family homes or day care or other child care agencies or facilities.

The DSHS is also specifically required to perform the following:

- develop, administer, supervise, and monitor a coordinated and comprehensive plan that establishes, aids, and strengthens services for the protection and care of runaway, dependent, or neglected children;
- within available resources, recruit an adequate number of prospective adoptive and foster homes, both regular and specialized, that is, homes for children of ethnic minority, including Indian homes for Indian children, sibling groups, handicapped and emotionally disturbed, teens, and pregnant and parenting teens;
- investigate complaints of any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker that results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, or sexual abuse or exploitation, or that presents an imminent risk of serious harm, and, on the basis of the findings of such investigation, offer child welfare services in relation to the

problem to such parents, legal custodians, or persons serving in loco parentis, and/or bring the situation to the attention of an appropriate court or another community agency;

- offer, on a voluntary basis, family reconciliation services to families who are in conflict;
- monitor out-of-home placements, on a timely and routine basis, to assure the safety, well-being, and quality of care being provided; and
- provide preventive services to families with children that prevent or shorten the duration of an out-of-home placement, within amounts appropriated for that specific purpose.

Summary:

By January 1, 2005, the DSHS is required to:

- consider options for the use of family decision meetings in cases in which a child is involved in the child welfare system;
- develop strategies for implementing a policy of meaningful family involvement throughout the state within existing resources; and
- present implementation recommendations to the appropriate committees of the Legislature regarding the options considered for the use of family decision meetings and the strategies developed for implementation of a policy of meaningful family involvement.

"Family decision meeting" is defined to mean a family-focused intervention facilitated by dedicated professional staff that is designed to build and strengthen the natural caregiving system for the child. The purpose of the family decision meeting is to establish a plan that provides for the safety and permanency needs of the child. Family decision meetings may include, but are not limited to, family group conferences, family mediation, family support meetings, or other professionally recognized interventions that include extended family and rely upon the family to make shared decisions about planning for its children.

Votes on Final Passage:

House 96 0
Senate 47 0

Effective: June 10, 2004