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**SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 5811**

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**State of Washington**

**58th Legislature**

**2003 Regular Session**

**By** Senate Committee on Children & Family Services & Corrections  
(originally sponsored by Senators Hargrove, Stevens and McAuliffe)

READ FIRST TIME 02/24/03.

1 AN ACT Relating to the involvement of the birth family in foster  
2 care; amending RCW 13.34.260; and creating a new section.

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

4 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** It is the intent of the legislature to  
5 recognize that there persists a large group of children who spend a  
6 significant part of their life in foster care - traumatized by an  
7 unrelieved separation, connected by blood ties that can be broken but  
8 never forgotten, torn between loyalties to birth family and foster  
9 family, alienated from memories both good and bad, disinherited from  
10 genetic endowment, ethnicity, and lineage and trying to face the future  
11 without a foundation from their past. Societal change warrants  
12 flexibility and openness to an expanded continuum of care arrangements.  
13 Interventions must focus on the best interests of the child. It is  
14 vital that full regard be given for active partnership of birth parents  
15 to the degree they are capable, within the foster care team. It is in  
16 the best interest of the child to do so. The ultimate purpose of any  
17 intervention into the life of a child is to improve it. Creating and  
18 sanctioning a connection between a child's birth parents and foster  
19 family will result in better relationships among birth families,

1 children, foster families, and social workers. It will provide greater  
2 foster placement stability and decreased disruptions as well as greater  
3 satisfaction for foster parents and social workers. It is the intent  
4 of the legislature to stress that all those individuals connected to  
5 the child in placement must have an abiding appreciation of the  
6 seriousness of a child's separation from the past whether it be of  
7 short, long, or permanent duration. Every child has a history and  
8 every foster child comes into placement with that history. It is the  
9 intent of the legislature to recognize and honor that history.

10 **Sec. 2.** RCW 13.34.260 and 2002 c 52 s 7 are each amended to read  
11 as follows:

12 (1) In an attempt to minimize the inherent intrusion in the lives  
13 of families involved in the foster care system and to maintain parental  
14 authority where appropriate, the department, absent good cause, shall  
15 follow the wishes of the natural parent regarding the placement of the  
16 child. Preferences such as family constellation, sibling  
17 relationships, ethnicity, and religion shall be considered when  
18 matching children to foster homes. Parental authority is appropriate  
19 in areas that are not connected with the abuse or neglect that resulted  
20 in the dependency and shall be integrated through the foster care team.

21 (2) When a child is placed in out-of-home care foster parents are  
22 encouraged to:

23 (a) Provide consultation to the foster care team based upon their  
24 experience with the child placed in their care;

25 (b) Mentor the birth parents by helping them understand their  
26 child's needs and correlating appropriate parenting responses;

27 (c) Participate in educational activities, and enter into  
28 community-building activities with birth families and other foster  
29 families;

30 (d) Transport children to family time visits with birth families  
31 and assist children and their families in maximizing the purposefulness  
32 of family time.

33 (3) For purposes of this section, "foster care team" means the  
34 foster parent currently providing care, the currently assigned social  
35 worker, and the parent or parents; and "birth family" means the persons

1 described in RCW 74.15.020(2)(a).

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