

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2996

As Reported by House Committee On:
Children & Family Services

Title: An act relating to trauma mitigation for children.

Brief Description: Creating a pilot program concerning trauma mitigation for children.

Sponsors: Representatives Walsh, Haler, Kagi, Roberts, Hankins and Santos.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Children & Family Services: 1/25/06, 1/26/06 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Creates the Trauma Mitigation for Children Pilot Program for children removed from their home by Child Protective Services.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Roberts, Vice Chair; Walsh, Ranking Minority Member; Hinkle, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Darneille, Dickerson, Dunn, Haler and Pettigrew.

Staff: Sydney Forrester (786-7120).

Background:

The Children's Administration Child Protective Services (CPS) investigates allegations of child abuse and neglect. Child Protective Services workers have authority to remove children from their home when harm or the serious risk of harm warrants removal. In emergent cases where children are immediately removed from their home, there is often an event or period of trauma that precedes removal. Various researchers have concluded that the psychological distress caused by trauma experienced in infancy or early childhood can compromise healthy brain development and result in a variety of problems later in life. Researchers also have identified certain trauma mitigation techniques for treating children exposed to trauma.

Safe Harbor Crisis Nursery was started in 1998 by community volunteers to respond to a need in the community for respite and crisis child-care for families. Since that time, it has provided over 10,000 child visits. Crisis and respite care at no-charge is available for low-income parents who need to attend job interviews, medical appointments, counseling, court

appearances, family reconciliation meetings, or when regular child-care plans fall apart at the last minute and a parent needs to report to work. Safe Harbor is one of only two crisis nurseries in Washington providing services to pregnant and parenting women who are participating in chemical dependency treatment programs.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

A three-year pilot program for providing research-based trauma mitigation services to children is established. The Trauma Mitigation for Children Pilot Program will be administered jointly by the Children's Administration and the Division of Mental Health within the Department of Social and Health Services. The pilot will be implemented at the Safe Harbor Crisis Nursery located in Kennewick. The Department may select one additional site based on community need and resources.

Program Structure:

The pilot must provide for:

- (1) implementing a regional trauma mitigation early intervention program for children;
- (2) creating a community-based response to the impact of trauma on children; and
- (3) identifying and strengthening local resources for developmentally appropriate services for children and families who have experienced trauma.

Program Services:

The program will serve children birth to age 12 who have been removed from their home by Child Protective Services (CPS). Evidence-based practices, including trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy, will be used. Children birth to six years of age, and sibling groups with children under six and up to 12 years of age may receive 24-hour group receiving care for up to seven days immediately following removal by CPS. The purpose of receiving care is to prepare children for transition to foster care. After the transition to foster care, children not enrolled in school may receive post-trauma child day care for up to 30 days. Child day care will include play therapy, art therapy, and music therapy as developmentally appropriate. For school age siblings, post-trauma interventions will be provided once a week for up to 30 days. Follow-up assessments will be conducted for each child at time of exit, and at six months and one year after exit.

The pilot program also will offer training for professionals, parents, foster parents, and caregivers regarding the impacts of exposure to trauma and the evidence-based interventions for mitigating its impacts. A report to the Legislature is due September 2009.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The intent section is modified to describe Safe Harbor's receiving care services and to clarify that the pilot program will use evidence-based practices. An additional reference to evidence-based practice is inserted and a specific practice is mentioned as an example. Technical corrections are made to the term *post-trauma*.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on 1/18/06.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed. However, the bill is null and void unless funded in the budget.

Testimony For: One of the most severe traumas children experience can be when a child is removed from home and placed in foster care. This trauma can be partially mitigated when siblings remain together and when children are given appropriate nurturing and support as they transition to foster care. Safe Harbor Crisis Nursery has been a venue in the community to help children feel safe and to help them transition into foster care after being removed from home by CPS. The nursery is really a beautiful home-like setting that provides child care and foster care, including care for sibling groups which can be very difficult to arrange. Large sibling groups present particular challenges when trying to make foster care placement arrangements. Safe Harbor provides a group receiving care home that allows siblings to remain intact in the initial stages following removal from home and allows more time to search for a placement to accommodate all siblings.

The receiving center concept is particularly intriguing, especially since we know that as a result of the Braam settlement there will be tighter requirements for providing screenings and assessments to children entering foster care. When a child enters foster care, a lot needs to be happening in the early stages. Initiatives in other states using receiving homes and assessment centers are showing promise in reducing the likelihood of multiple placements and allowing sibling groups to remain together.

Safe Harbor also is the only center for drop-in and crisis infant care in the Tri-Cities. The family Policy Council's statistics from Benton and Franklin counties show a reduction in referrals to Child Protective Services between 2000 and 2004. We believe it is because of the crisis and respite services we offered to families at Safe Harbor.

Testimony Against: The Children's Administration has concerns about including infants with older children and about mixing children who present a risk to others with children who are victims of abuse or neglect. The bill does not specify which trauma-exposed children would be eligible for services. We are also concerned about the use of evidence-based practice. The program described in the bill does not identify any evidence-based practice of which we are aware. The Department of Social and Health Services (Department) supports the use of trauma focused cognitive behavioral therapy for children exposed to trauma. The Department also cannot support the bill because it is not funded in the Governor's budget.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Walsh, prime sponsor; Sue Delucchi, Safe Harbor Crisis Nursery; and Laurie Lippold, Children's Home Society.

(Opposed) Tammi Erickson, Department of Social and Health Services, Children's Administration.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.