
**Juvenile Justice & Family Law
Committee**

HB 1279

Brief Description: Revising provisions relating to public access to child in need of services and at-risk youth hearings.

Sponsors: Representatives Kagi, Hinkle, Dickerson, McDonald, Clibborn, P. Sullivan, Pettigrew, Roach, Orcutt, Morrell, Kenney, Wallace and Chase.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires child in need of services and at-risk youth hearings to be open to the public unless the judge finds that closing the hearings is in the best interests of the child.

Hearing Date: 2/2/05

Staff: Sonja Hallum (786-7092).

Background:

There are several different types of hearings that pertain to the welfare of children. Some of the hearings that pertain to children include child in need of services (CHINS), at-risk youth (ARY), dependency, and termination hearings.

CHINS proceedings may be initiated by a parent or child to request the court to approve or continue an out-of-home placement. An ARY proceeding may be initiated by a parent who seeks assistance from the court in maintaining parental control over his or her child. Dependency and termination proceedings are generally initiated by the state in cases where the state is alleging the parent is not providing sufficiently appropriate care for his or her child and the state is seeking to intervene in the relationship.

CHINS, ARY, dependency and termination hearings have traditionally been closed to the public largely due to the sensitive nature of matters that are often discussed about the children involved in the cases. However, states have been increasingly moving towards opening these hearings to the public. In 1993, the Washington Legislature passed ESB 5379 which required that the public not be excluded from any dependency or termination hearings unless the judge finds that excluding the public is in the best interests of the child.

CHINS and ARY hearings remain closed to the public.

Summary of Bill:

CHINS and ARY hearings are required to be open to the public unless the judge finds that excluding the public is in the best interests of the child.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.