

FINAL BILL REPORT

SHB 2156

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Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Creating a joint task force on child safety.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Children & Family Services (originally sponsored by Representatives Hinkle, Kagi, Nixon, Pettigrew, McDonald, Dickerson, Pearson, Springer, Rodne and Williams).

House Committee on Children & Family Services

House Committee on Appropriations

Senate Committee on Human Services & Corrections

Background:

If there are allegations of abandonment, abuse or neglect, or no parent who is capable of caring for a child, the state may investigate the allegations and initiate a dependency proceeding in juvenile court. If the court finds the statutory requirements have been met, the court will find the child to be a dependent of the state.

Whenever the court orders a dependent child to be removed from the home, the court will enter a dispositional plan which will include the obligations of the parties including the parents, the supervising agency or Department of Social and Health Services (Department), and the child. The dispositional order will contain an order for the placement of the child either within the home or outside of the home. If the child is placed outside the home, he or she may be placed with a relative or in non-relative foster care.

Within 60 days of assuming responsibility for the child, the Department is required to provide the court with a permanency plan for the child. The permanency plan will contain the desired goal for the child which may include a plan to return the child home, adoption, long-term placement, or guardianship, including a dependency guardianship. The court must hold the permanency planning hearing when a child has been in out-of-home care for nine months. The hearing must take place within 12 months of the current placement.

The status of all dependent children must be reviewed by the court every six months. During the review the court will examine the progress of the parents in meeting the requirements of the dispositional plan. At this hearing the court may return the child to the home if the parent has made sufficient progress.

If the parent fails to make progress in curing the parental deficiencies which led to the dependency, or if one of the statutory aggravating factors exist, a termination petition may be filed. If the court finds the statutory grounds for termination are met, the court will terminate the parental rights and the parent will no longer have rights, privileges, or obligations toward the child.

Summary:

A task force is created to review issues pertaining to the health, safety and welfare of children receiving services from child protective services and child welfare services.

The task force membership includes members from the legislature, Washington Council for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, child fatality review committees, the Department, public defenders, Office of Family and Children's Ombudsman, Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs, Department of Health, Attorney General, Superior Court Judges Association, social workers, foster parents, birth parents, Washington state Indian tribes, and organizations that serve children involved in the child welfare system.

The joint task force will make recommendations to the Legislature and the Governor on the following issues:

- state and federal statutes regarding child safety, placement, removal from the home, termination of parental rights, and reunification with parents;
- current and ongoing Department work groups or work plans regarding child safety, placement, removal from the home, termination of parental rights, and reunification with parents;
- the purpose and value of child protection teams and whether any changes should be made;
- best practices regarding children removed from parents at birth and placed in out-of-home care, transition services for families, and standards for return to home placement including situations where a child has been placed out-of-home and returned to home multiple times;
- the training that is offered to social workers regarding child development and whether any changes should be made;
- best practices regarding sharing of information;
- best practices for assessing and addressing chemical dependency issues of parents;
- the effectiveness of current home-based service providers currently used and whether any changes should be made;
- best practices addressing family cultural and tribal issues and the role, if any, of social worker training or bias in safety assessment and placement decisions; and
- other issues deemed relevant to improving child safety outcomes.

Preliminary findings are due to the legislature by Dec. 31, 2005 and a final report is due September 1, 2006.

Votes on Final Passage:

House	94	0	
Senate	49	0	(Senate amended)
House			(House refused to concur)
Senate	48	0	(Senate amended)
House	97	0	(House concurred)

Effective: May 13, 2005