
**Early Learning & Children's
Services Committee**

HB 2238

Brief Description: Providing for the completion of comprehensive hearing assessments for infants who fail a newborn hearing screening.

Sponsors: Representatives Kagi, Walsh, Dickerson, Fromhold, Darneille, McDermott, Hunt, O'Brien, Kenney, Morrell, Goodman, Simpson, Ormsby, Santos and Green.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Authorizes the Department of Health to contact families of infants who fail a newborn hearing screening for the purpose of assisting the families in obtaining a comprehensive hearing assessment for the infants.

Hearing Date: 2/20/07

Staff: Sydney Forrester (786-7120).

Background:

The Department of Health (DOH) requires hospital-based screening tests of all newborn infants for certain heritable or metabolic disorders leading to mental retardation or physical defects. Laboratories, physicians, hospitals, and others performing these screening notify the DOH when a positive screening results. The DOH then offers the use of its services and facilities to the infant's primary care physician or the infant's parents if no primary care physician can be identified.

Newborn hearing screenings currently are not part of the DOH's set of mandatory newborn screening. Through the voluntary efforts by the state's hospitals to implement a universal newborn hearing screening program, 99 percent of Washington babies are screened at birth for hearing loss. Results of newborn hearing screenings are sent to the DOH much like the results of a mandatory screening.

Parents of infants who fail a newborn hearing screening are referred to community providers for a comprehensive hearing assessment for the infant. In most cases, the results of the comprehensive

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assessments also are sent to DOH. In some cases, however, the DOH receives no information regarding whether the family was able to obtain a full hearing assessment for the infants. This may occur when the family's primary care physician can not be identified or if the family has no primary care physician. The DOH is not authorized to contact families of these infants directly to assist them in obtaining a full assessment.

There currently are approximately 115 infants who failed a newborn hearing screening for whom the DOH has no information regarding whether a comprehensive assessment was completed. The DOH is in the process of obtaining permission to conduct a one-time survey of these families to attempt to gather information about the assessments.

Approximately 230 babies are born with a hearing loss each year in Washington. More than half of these babies have no known risk factors for hearing loss, and 90 percent are born to hearing parents. Educators and other professionals serving children who are deaf or hearing impaired emphasize the importance of early identification and early intervention in better supporting the early child development needs of children who are deaf or hearing impaired.

Summary of Bill:

The DOH is authorized to contact families of infants who fail a newborn hearing screening for the purpose of assisting the family in obtaining a comprehensive hearing assessment. The procedures used must be consistent with the procedures used by the DOH when it contacts families of infants who fail other screenings. The DOH also is directed to brief the Legislature on its findings in surveying the families of infants who failed a newborn screening but for whom no information is known about whether the family was able to obtain a comprehensive assessment for the infant.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 19, 2007.

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