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

HB 3187

Brief Description: Establishing systems to support families who have adopted children from foster care.

Sponsors: Representatives Pettigrew, Haler, Hunter, Kagi, Schual-Berke, Appleton, Loomis, Sullivan, Dickerson, Green, Lantz, Hudgins, Simpson, Darneille, McIntire, Roberts, Kenney, Wood, Santos and Ormsby.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Directs the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to contract for a statewide resource and referral program to provide post- adoption information and referrals to families who adopt children from foster care.
- Directs the DSHS to contact for education advocacy services to be provided to families who adopt children from foster care.

Hearing Date: 2/4/08

Staff: Sydney Forrester (786-7120).

Background:

The DSHS reports that about 1,000 adoptions of children from the state's foster care system are completed each year, with many children still awaiting adoptive homes. Approximately 750 children in Washington currently are eligible for adoption out of foster care. These children are legally free and eligible for adoption because the parental rights of their parents have been terminated by a court of law.

Children adopted out of the foster care system frequently have special needs, in part as a result of circumstances by which they came into foster care. These children may have medical, mental, or physical health needs, developmental delays, and/or developmental disabilities. Families adopting children with special needs from the foster care system usually qualify for a monthly cash

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payment, or an adoption subsidy, to help pay some of the expenses of raising a child with special needs. Adoptive families also may receive some limited training related to the child's needs prior to placement. Other than the adoption subsidy and limited training, however, there is no statewide program of coordinated permanency and post-adoption support for children with special needs and their adoptive families.

The North American Council on Adoptable Children recommends that all states develop a system for ensuring families who adopt children with special needs, and especially families adopting children from foster care, have access to information and referral from a single entry point, such as a toll-free phone number answered 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Various states, including Oregon, Maryland, Virginia, and New York, include a statewide resource and referral program as part of their post-adoption supports to families.

Adoption Disruption and Dissolution

Adoption disruption occurs after a child has been placed with an adoptive family but before the adoption has been finalized. The disruption means the child is returned to foster care either permanently or until the child is returned to the adoptive home or is placed in another adoptive home. Adoption dissolution or termination occurs when a child is returned to foster care after the adoption has been finalized. Various studies of nationwide trends indicate that adoption disruption rates range between 8 percent and 16 percent. Research on adoption dissolutions indicates between 1 percent and 7 percent of adoptions are terminated after being finalized.

Risk factors associated with adoption disruption include: age of child; severity of abuse or neglect; disabilities and behavior problems; ethnicity, family structure, and socio-demographics; and family and child characteristics.

Summary of Bill:

The DSHS, within amounts appropriated, is directed to contract for a statewide information resource and referral program. The contract must provide for the information and referrals to be provided by someone knowledgeable and experienced in adoption issues. The program may include referrals to community services, individual and family counseling; relevant training opportunities; and a lending library.

Also within funds appropriated, the DSHS is directed to contract for education advocacy services to be provided to families who have adopted children from foster care. Advocacy services should be designed to provide support and guidance to parents in navigating the education system. Examples of services include training, information & referral on educational matters, consultation, and direct advocacy.

The DSHS must encourage parents of children adopted from foster care to seek an annual assessment of the child's functioning with the family to determine if there are services needed or recommended that will strengthen and maintain the adoptive placement.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 23, 2008.

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