
HOUSE BILL 1335

State of Washington 60th Legislature 2007 Regular Session

By Representatives Hinkle, Walsh and Linville

Read first time 01/17/2007. Referred to Committee on Early Learning & Children's Services.

1 AN ACT Relating to improving casework in child welfare cases;
2 adding a new section to chapter 74.13 RCW; and creating a new section.

3 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

4 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** Tragic child fatalities in the state over
5 the past several years have focused attention on the safety of children
6 in our child welfare system. In reviewing child safety issues within
7 the child welfare system, issues related to child welfare caseworkers
8 arise frequently. Child welfare caseworkers are asked to deal with the
9 difficult situations, often crisis situations, involving the lives of
10 children and families. Many of these caseworkers are inexperienced
11 workers who are new to the field, and some do not have an educational
12 background in social work. These workers are required to take on
13 challenging cases on their own and are expected to make good choices
14 without errors in judgment.

15 In other occupations dealing with crisis situations such as law
16 enforcement and emergency medical treatment providers, workers operate
17 under a very different model. Law enforcement and emergency medical
18 providers work in teams to provide the best care for the people they

1 serve. New workers are paired with more experienced workers, and they
2 both are given the opportunity to work as a team to reach decisions.

3 Employing a team approach in child welfare will also improve
4 outcomes and safety for children in the child welfare system. This
5 approach will lead to better caseworker decision making, more focus on
6 parents which will lead to an increase in safe reunifications, and an
7 increased retention of caseworkers.

8 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 74.13 RCW
9 to read as follows:

10 To the extent funding is appropriated in the operating budget, the
11 department shall establish a pilot program to improve child welfare
12 casework through the development of a team approach to casework by
13 December 1, 2007. The pilot program shall extend through December 31,
14 2010, to the extent that funding is provided.

15 (1) The program sites shall be selected by September 1, 2007, and
16 shall consist of two sites, with at least one site located in eastern
17 Washington.

18 (2) The program shall assign caseworkers in teams of two to staff
19 all aspects of the child welfare case. The caseworkers shall be
20 assigned cases for which they are jointly responsible. The caseworkers
21 shall jointly staff the cases and make decisions as a team. However,
22 the caseworkers may divide the work to permit one caseworker to focus
23 on the child and one caseworker to focus on the parents in the case.
24 Decisions in the case, however, should be discussed and reached as a
25 team.

26 (3) The program shall include a caseworker to supervisor ratio of
27 no greater than twelve caseworkers to one supervisor.

28 (4) The department shall measure the performance and outcomes of
29 the program, including changes in any of the following:
30 Reunifications, child abuse or neglect re-referrals, continuances or
31 delays in the court case, progress in dependency cases, caseworker
32 satisfaction, retention, and safety. The department shall report its
33 preliminary findings to the legislature by December 2009 and a final
34 report by December 2010.

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