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

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**HB 1419**

**Brief Description:** Revising provisions affecting sexually aggressive youth.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Kagi, Dickerson, Walsh, Roberts, Hunt and Appleton.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Clarifies the authority of the Department of Social and Health Services to provide treatment services to sexually aggressive youth and their families.

**Hearing Date:** 2/5/09

**Staff:** Sydney Forrester (786-7120)

**Background:**

The legal framework relating to children and their ability to commit crimes is:

1. Children under age 8 are incapable of committing a crime.
2. Children over age 8 and under age 12 are presumed to be incapable of committing a crime, but the presumption may be overcome by proof the child had sufficient capacity to understand the act and knew it was wrong.
3. Children age 12 and over are capable of committing a crime, but like adults, evidence may be offered sufficient to find that the child did not have sufficient capacity to understand the act and did not know it was wrong.

When a law enforcement agency is investigating a complaint alleging a child has committed a sex offense and the investigation reveals the child is under age 8, the law enforcement agency must refer the case to the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) for a Child Protective Services (CPS) investigation. If, however, there is probable cause to believe the child is over age 8 and has committed a sex offense, the agency must refer the case to the local prosecutor for a determination of whether the child may be prosecuted for the offense. For

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children over age 8 but under age 12, the judge or prosecutor may determine the child cannot be prosecuted because the child is incapable of committing a crime. When such a determination is made on behalf of a child under age 12, and when the prosecutor determines there is probable cause to believe the child engaged in conduct that would constitute a sex offense, the prosecutor must refer the child to CPS as a sexually aggressive youth.

A "sexually aggressive youth" is defined as a child who has been abused and has committed a sexually aggressive act or other violent act of a sexual nature, and who:

1. is in the care and custody of the state or a tribe;
2. is subject to a dependency proceeding or a tribal child welfare proceeding; or
3. has been referred to CPS by law enforcement based on a determination the child cannot be detained in the juvenile justice system based on age or incompetence to stand trial for acts that could be prosecuted as sexual offenses.

Child Protective Services must investigate all referrals from law enforcement regarding a sexually aggressive youth, including referrals relating to children under age 12, CPS must investigate. The purposes of the CPS investigation are to determine whether:

1. the child has been abused or neglected; or
2. the child or the child's parents are in need of services or treatment.

The DSHS may offer services and treatment or refer the child and his or her parents to appropriate services and treatment in the community. If the child's parents refuse to accept or fail to obtain appropriate services and the circumstances indicate the refusal or failure constitutes abuse or neglect, the DSHS may pursue a dependency action.

Laws relating to expenditures of funding appropriated to treatment programs for sexually aggressive youth have been interpreted by some practitioners to limit the access to treatment to only those children and families subject to dependency proceedings.

#### **Summary of Bill:**

A child and his or her parents are declared eligible to receive services under treatment programs for sexually aggressive youth, regardless of whether the child has been found to be dependent or whether the child and family are subject to dependency proceedings.

Protective plans, service and treatment plans, including progress reports, and the child's status as a sexually aggressive youth are confidential and not subject to disclosure by the DSHS. Information sharing with other juvenile justice and care agencies is permitted, but the information remains confidential and is not subject to public disclosure by those agencies.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 21, 2009.

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