

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5393

As of March 10, 2011

Title: An act relating to unannounced monthly visits to persons providing care to children in the dependency system.

Brief Description: Providing for unannounced visits to homes with dependent children.

Sponsors: Senators Hargrove, Stevens, Harper, Regala, White, Carrell, McAuliffe, Shin and Tom.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections: 1/27/11.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Staff: Jennifer Strus (786-7316)

Background: State law requires that caseworkers with the Children's Administration (CA) in the Department of Social and Health Services and supervising agencies, monitor placements of children in out-of-home care and in-home dependencies to assure the children's safety. CA and supervising agencies must conduct a private and individual face-to-face visit with caregivers each month. Federal law also requires that children in out of home care are seen by a caseworker on a monthly basis.

Summary of Bill: CA and the supervising agencies must randomly select no less than 10 percent of the caregivers currently providing care (both out of home placements and in-home dependencies) to receive one unannounced face-to-face visit in the caregiver's home per year. If the caseworker makes a good faith effort to conduct the unannounced visit and is unable to do so, that month's visit to the caregiver need not be unannounced. CA and the supervising agencies are encouraged to group monthly visits to caregivers by geographic area so that in the event an unannounced visit cannot be completed, the caseworker may complete other required monthly visits located in that vicinity.

Technical changes are made to consolidate the amendments made to this act by three separate bills during the 2009 session.

Appropriation: None.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: At this year's Youth Summit in Seattle, one of the consistent concerns by the youth that attended was safety in foster care. While many youth had a good foster care experience, some did not. This bill should be viewed as a best practice policy in helping to ensure that children in foster care are safe. This bill is not intended to be disrespectful of foster parents or the good work they do. In other states, unannounced visits have helped foster parents refute allegations against them. A social worker cannot see what happens in foster care so that is why an unannounced visit occasionally is a good idea. It is not fair to children to be removed from their parents for safety reasons and placed in a foster home that has the same issues as the home from which the children were removed – this bill will help to assure that foster homes are safe. It is important to monitor the balance between the foster parents and the social workers. Unannounced visits are an opportunity for social workers to see the positive things that foster parents do and to assist them in that venture.

CON: The bill is redundant; social workers can already make unannounced visits if they want. There are a bevy of different people coming into foster parent's homes now. Foster parents are supposed to be part of a team and this bill would require someone to spot check what they are doing. This is not a good use of state resources. It is important to strengthen the foster children's voices but there will be unintended consequences if this bill goes forward. Foster parents are in a fishbowl now and that would get worse if this bill is passed. Foster parents already feel a lack of appreciation and trust from the social workers and this bill will not do anything to improve that feeling. This bill will also hurt the recruitment and retention of foster parents in the state system. A surprise visit now and then is not going to improve safety for children.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Jim Theofelis, Degale Cooper, Cameron Williams, Terrell Rosetti, Amenda Bentyn, Mockingbird Society.

CON: Nancy Schrader, Beth Canfield, Foster Parent Association of Washington.