

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1261

As Reported by House Committee On:
Early Learning & Human Services

Title: An act relating to the provision of short-term emergency and crisis care for children removed from their homes.

Brief Description: Establishing receiving care centers for emergency and crisis care for children removed from their homes.

Sponsors: Representatives Hope and Santos.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Early Learning & Human Services: 2/5/13, 2/15/13 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires that the Department of Social and Health Services develop rules to establish a licensure category for resource and assessment centers.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & HUMAN SERVICES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Freeman, Vice Chair; Walsh, Ranking Minority Member; Scott, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Farrell, Goodman, MacEwen, Overstreet, Roberts, Sawyer and Zeiger.

Staff: Lindsay Lanham (786-7120).

Background:

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) has the authority to establish licensing requirements for foster homes and other agencies or entities that provide care for children residing in out-of-home placements. Resource and assessment centers provide immediate placement and care for children who have been removed from their homes for up to seven days. Resource and assessment centers have entered into an agreement with

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regional DSHS offices to provide emergency or crisis care to children. Currently, resource and assessment centers are not formally licensed by the DSHS.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

A licensing category is created for a program called resource and assessment centers. Resource and assessment centers provide emergency placement and care for children birth to 12 years of age who have been removed from their homes because of child maltreatment. A resource and assessment center may provide placement for a child over 12 years of age, if the child has a sibling under age 13 who is also placed in the receiving care center. In order to be a licensed resource and assessment center, programs must demonstrate the following: there is a need for a resource and assessment center in the local community; the resource and assessment center is primarily staffed by trained volunteers; and the resource and assessment center is not financially dependent on reimbursement for the state to operate. When adopting licensing rules, the DSHS must allow for flexibility in operating hours for resource and assessment centers and provide centers the ability to operate in a residential area. Resource and assessment centers may operate for up to 24 hours, seven days a week. Resource and assessment centers may not be utilized to address placement disruptions for children who have been removed from a foster home because of behavior or safety concerns.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The program name "receiving care center" is changed to "resource and assessment center." The allowable placement time in a resource and assessment center is shortened to 72 hours, excluding Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays. Resource and assessment centers may only be licensed if there is a need for a resource and assessment center in the local community, the resource and assessment center is primarily staffed by trained volunteers, and the resource and assessment center is not financially dependent on reimbursement for the state to operate. Resource and assessment centers do not need to remain open if no children are placed at the center. The substitute bill specifies that resource and assessment centers may not be utilized to address placement disruptions for children who have been removed from a foster home because of behavior or safety concerns.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on February 18, 2013.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Communities are fortunate to have receiving care centers (hereafter resource and assessment centers) as placement options for children when they are removed from their

homes. Child placements are a challenging component of public child welfare practice. There is a shortage of foster placements. Additionally, children requiring foster placements tend to struggle with behavioral and psychological concerns. As such, finding an appropriate foster home placement can be difficult. Children may be placed out of county and sibling groups can be separated because of a lack of an appropriate foster home. Child placing agencies are looking into expanding opportunities for children and engage in larger discussion about child placements.

A group asked the DSHS to develop a pilot program so they were able to provide emergency care to children who were removed from their homes. The group provides emergency and short-term placement for children so the DSHS has time to secure a long-term placement for the child. The group provides a home-like setting so children can play and engage in activities. Through an established relationship with Swedish Medical Center, the group can further assess and treat children for communicable diseases. Additionally, the facility can help stabilize children and meet the children's basic needs.

The program can be replicated throughout the state. The group has established policies and written best practices. The program is not a replacement for foster homes or other types of licensed placements already utilized by the DSHS. Resource and assessments centers are for emergency placements.

(Neutral) Some see resource and assessment centers as a crucial support for the community. There is a concern regarding a possible statutory conflict with the length a time a child may remain at resource and assessment centers. There are further concerns that a program based on volunteerism may not be an enduring support. If the DSHS could meet the emergency placement needs of children, there would not be a need for a resource and assessment center and children could be placed in a manner that did not require a subsequent move. This is, however, not the reality for Washington today.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Hope, prime sponsor; Joel Pettit, Washington Federation of State Employees; and Todd McNeal, Hand in Hand.

(Neutral) Celeste Carey, Community Family Services Foundation; and Randy Hart, Department of Social and Health Services, Children's Administration.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.