

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5281

As of February 5, 2013

Title: An act relating to an empirical study of the validity and reliability of the current child welfare safety assessment tool.

Brief Description: Requiring an empirical study of the validity and reliability of the current child welfare safety assessment tool.

Sponsors: Senators Carrell, Darneille, Tom, Fain and Roach.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections: 2/04/13.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Staff: Shani Bauer (786-7468)

Background: Safety assessments are used throughout the life of a dependency case to identify impending danger, determine whether a child is safe or unsafe, and inform the decision of whether the Department of Social and Health Services' Children's Administration should provide and monitor ongoing services to a family following investigation of child abuse or neglect allegations. It is based on comprehensive information gathered about the family and completion of the safety assessment tool consisting of 17 specific questions. The purpose of the assessment is to identify families who are most likely to experience a future event of child abuse or neglect.

Summary of Bill: The Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) must conduct an empirical study of the validity and reliability of the safety assessment tool currently used in child welfare cases by the Children's Administration. In conducting the study, WSIPP must determine:

- whether other empirically based child welfare safety assessment tools exist and if so, compare those tools to the tool used by the Children's Administration; and
- whether other factors or combination of factors not included in the current safety assessment tool should be included to help predict real outcomes.

In conducting the study, WSIPP must consult with an advisory group consisting of representatives from the research department at the Administrative Office of the Courts, the

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research and data analysis division at the Department of Social and Health Services, and a university-based child welfare research entity.

A report on the study is due to the appropriate policy committees of the Legislature by December 15, 2013.

Appropriation: None.

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: The safety assessment tool has been a topic of conversation at many union meetings. There is quite a bit of duplication between the family assessment and the safety assessment, so we would recommend that the study include the family assessment as well. Caseworkers are short on time and would appreciate a reduction in the duplication. In gathering information, it would be helpful if WSIPP would conduct interviews with line staff.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Alia Griffing, WA State Federation of State Employees.