

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5281

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Human Services & Corrections, February 14, 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, 2/14/13 [DPS-WM].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5281 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Carrell, Chair; Pearson, Vice Chair; Darneille, Ranking Member; Hargrove, Harper and Padden.

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' (DSHS) 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 (Recommended Substitute): 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 identify:

- whether other empirically based child welfare safety assessment tools exists and if so, compare those tools to the tool used by the Children's Administration;

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- whether other factors or combination of factors not included in the current safety assessment tool should be included to help predict real outcomes; and
- where possible, unnecessary duplication in the application of the family assessment tool.

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 research and data analysis division at DSHS, a university-based child welfare research entity, and Children's Administration caseworkers.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS COMMITTEE (Recommended Substitute): In conducting its study, WSIPP must identify, where possible, unnecessary duplication in the application of the family assessment tool and consult with Children's Administration caseworkers.

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 on Original Bill: 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.