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**HOUSE BILL 1728**

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**State of Washington 64th Legislature 2015 Regular Session**

**By** Representatives Ormsby, Walsh, Ortiz-Self, Senn, Kagi, S. Hunt, Farrell, Dent, Zeiger, and Gregerson

AN ACT Relating to creating the parents for parents program; reenacting and amending RCW 13.34.030; adding new sections to chapter 13.34 RCW; and creating a new section.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  Early outreach and education helps shift the attitudes of parents involved in the dependency court system from anger and resentment to acknowledgment and acceptance, enhances parents' engagement in court-ordered plans in the dependency system, and increases the likelihood of family reunification. The parents for parents program has been shown to increase the number of family reunifications, where appropriate, while decreasing the length of time needed to establish permanence. The program currently exists in seven counties: Grays Harbor/Pacific, King, Kitsap, Pierce, Snohomish, Spokane, and Thurston/Mason. It is the legislature's goal to continue to support the program in these counties, standardize the parents for parents curriculum among counties in which it is currently utilized, and replicate the program statewide by the end of the 2019–2021 biennium.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 13.34 RCW to read as follows:

(1) The goal of the parents for parents program is to increase the permanency and well-being of children in foster care through peer mentoring that increases parental engagement and contributes to family reunification.

(2) The parents for parents program shall provide structured peer mentoring for families entering the dependency court system, administered by veteran parents.

**Sec.**  RCW 13.34.030 and 2013 c 332 s 2 and 2013 c 182 s 2 are each reenacted and amended to read as follows:

For purposes of this chapter:

(1) "Abandoned" means when the child's parent, guardian, or other custodian has expressed, either by statement or conduct, an intent to forego, for an extended period, parental rights or responsibilities despite an ability to exercise such rights and responsibilities. If the court finds that the petitioner has exercised due diligence in attempting to locate the parent, no contact between the child and the child's parent, guardian, or other custodian for a period of three months creates a rebuttable presumption of abandonment, even if there is no expressed intent to abandon.

(2) "Child," "juvenile," and "youth" means:

(a) Any individual under the age of eighteen years; or

(b) Any individual age eighteen to twenty-one years who is eligible to receive and who elects to receive the extended foster care services authorized under RCW 74.13.031. A youth who remains dependent and who receives extended foster care services under RCW 74.13.031 shall not be considered a "child" under any other statute or for any other purpose.

(3) "Current placement episode" means the period of time that begins with the most recent date that the child was removed from the home of the parent, guardian, or legal custodian for purposes of placement in out-of-home care and continues until: (a) The child returns home; (b) an adoption decree, a permanent custody order, or guardianship order is entered; or (c) the dependency is dismissed, whichever occurs first.

(4) "Department" means the department of social and health services.

(5) "Dependency guardian" means the person, nonprofit corporation, or Indian tribe appointed by the court pursuant to this chapter for the limited purpose of assisting the court in the supervision of the dependency.

(6) "Dependent child" means any child who:

(a) Has been abandoned;

(b) Is abused or neglected as defined in chapter 26.44 RCW by a person legally responsible for the care of the child;

(c) Has no parent, guardian, or custodian capable of adequately caring for the child, such that the child is in circumstances which constitute a danger of substantial damage to the child's psychological or physical development; or

(d) Is receiving extended foster care services, as authorized by RCW 74.13.031.

(7) "Developmental disability" means a disability attributable to intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, autism, or another neurological or other condition of an individual found by the secretary to be closely related to an intellectual disability or to require treatment similar to that required for individuals with intellectual disabilities, which disability originates before the individual attains age eighteen, which has continued or can be expected to continue indefinitely, and which constitutes a substantial limitation to the individual.

(8) "Educational liaison" means a person who has been appointed by the court to fulfill responsibilities outlined in RCW 13.34.046.

(9) "Extended foster care services" means residential and other support services the department is authorized to provide under RCW 74.13.031. These services may include placement in licensed, relative, or otherwise approved care, or supervised independent living settings; assistance in meeting basic needs; independent living services; medical assistance; and counseling or treatment.

(10) "Guardian" means the person or agency that: (a) Has been appointed as the guardian of a child in a legal proceeding, including a guardian appointed pursuant to chapter 13.36 RCW; and (b) has the legal right to custody of the child pursuant to such appointment. The term "guardian" does not include a "dependency guardian" appointed pursuant to a proceeding under this chapter.

(11) "Guardian ad litem" means a person, appointed by the court to represent the best interests of a child in a proceeding under this chapter, or in any matter which may be consolidated with a proceeding under this chapter. A "court-appointed special advocate" appointed by the court to be the guardian ad litem for the child, or to perform substantially the same duties and functions as a guardian ad litem, shall be deemed to be guardian ad litem for all purposes and uses of this chapter.

(12) "Guardian ad litem program" means a court-authorized volunteer program, which is or may be established by the superior court of the county in which such proceeding is filed, to manage all aspects of volunteer guardian ad litem representation for children alleged or found to be dependent. Such management shall include but is not limited to: Recruitment, screening, training, supervision, assignment, and discharge of volunteers.

(13) "Housing assistance" means appropriate referrals by the department or other supervising agencies to federal, state, local, or private agencies or organizations, assistance with forms, applications, or financial subsidies or other monetary assistance for housing. For purposes of this chapter, "housing assistance" is not a remedial service or time-limited family reunification service as described in RCW 13.34.025(2).

(14) "Indigent" means a person who, at any stage of a court proceeding, is:

(a) Receiving one of the following types of public assistance: Temporary assistance for needy families, aged, blind, or disabled assistance benefits, medical care services under RCW 74.09.035, pregnant women assistance benefits, poverty-related veterans' benefits, food stamps or food stamp benefits transferred electronically, refugee resettlement benefits, medicaid, or supplemental security income; or

(b) Involuntarily committed to a public mental health facility; or

(c) Receiving an annual income, after taxes, of one hundred twenty-five percent or less of the federally established poverty level; or

(d) Unable to pay the anticipated cost of counsel for the matter before the court because his or her available funds are insufficient to pay any amount for the retention of counsel.

(15) "Nonminor dependent" means any individual age eighteen to twenty-one years who is participating in extended foster care services authorized under RCW 74.13.031.

(16) "Out-of-home care" means placement in a foster family home or group care facility licensed pursuant to chapter 74.15 RCW or placement in a home, other than that of the child's parent, guardian, or legal custodian, not required to be licensed pursuant to chapter 74.15 RCW.

(17) "Preventive services" means preservation services, as defined in chapter 74.14C RCW, and other reasonably available services, including housing assistance, capable of preventing the need for out-of-home placement while protecting the child.

(18) "Shelter care" means temporary physical care in a facility licensed pursuant to RCW 74.15.030 or in a home not required to be licensed pursuant to RCW 74.15.030.

(19) "Sibling" means a child's birth brother, birth sister, adoptive brother, adoptive sister, half-brother, or half-sister, or as defined by the law or custom of the Indian child's tribe for an Indian child as defined in RCW 13.38.040.

(20) "Social study" means a written evaluation of matters relevant to the disposition of the case and shall contain the following information:

(a) A statement of the specific harm or harms to the child that intervention is designed to alleviate;

(b) A description of the specific services and activities, for both the parents and child, that are needed in order to prevent serious harm to the child; the reasons why such services and activities are likely to be useful; the availability of any proposed services; and the agency's overall plan for ensuring that the services will be delivered. The description shall identify the services chosen and approved by the parent;

(c) If removal is recommended, a full description of the reasons why the child cannot be protected adequately in the home, including a description of any previous efforts to work with the parents and the child in the home; the in-home treatment programs that have been considered and rejected; the preventive services, including housing assistance, that have been offered or provided and have failed to prevent the need for out-of-home placement, unless the health, safety, and welfare of the child cannot be protected adequately in the home; and the parents' attitude toward placement of the child;

(d) A statement of the likely harms the child will suffer as a result of removal;

(e) A description of the steps that will be taken to minimize the harm to the child that may result if separation occurs including an assessment of the child's relationship and emotional bond with any siblings, and the agency's plan to provide ongoing contact between the child and the child's siblings if appropriate; and

(f) Behavior that will be expected before determination that supervision of the family or placement is no longer necessary.

(21) "Supervised independent living" includes, but is not limited to, apartment living, room and board arrangements, college or university dormitories, and shared roommate settings. Supervised independent living settings must be approved by the children's administration or the court.

(22) "Supervising agency" means an agency licensed by the state under RCW 74.15.090, or licensed by a federally recognized Indian tribe located in this state under RCW 74.15.190, that has entered into a performance-based contract with the department to provide case management for the delivery and documentation of child welfare services as defined in RCW 74.13.020.

(23) "Veteran parent" means a parent who has successfully navigated the juvenile dependency court system, resulting in family reunification.

(24) "Voluntary placement agreement" means, for the purposes of extended foster care services, a written voluntary agreement between a nonminor dependent who agrees to submit to the care and authority of the department for the purposes of participating in the extended foster care program.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 13.34 RCW to read as follows:

Components of the parents for parents program, provided by veteran parents, must include:

(1) Outreach and support to parents at dependency-related hearings, beginning with the shelter care hearing;

(2) A class that educates parents about the dependency system they must navigate in order to have their children returned, empowers them with tools and resources they need to be successful with their case plan, and provides information that helps them understand and support the needs of their children;

(3) Ongoing support to help parents overcome barriers to success in completing their case plan;

(4) Structured, curriculum-based peer support groups.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 13.34 RCW to read as follows:

(1) The parents for parents program must be funded through the office of public defense and centrally administered through a pass-through to a Washington state nonprofit-lead organization that has extensive experience supporting veteran parents.

(2) Through the contract with the lead organization, each local program must be locally administered by the county superior court or a nonprofit organization that shall serve as the host organization.

(3) Local stakeholders representing key child welfare systems shall serve as parents for parents program advisors. Examples of local stakeholders include the children's administration, the superior court, attorneys for the parents, assistant attorneys general, and court-appointed special advocates or guardians ad litem.

(4) A veteran parent lead shall provide program coordination and maintain local program information.

(5) The lead organization shall provide ongoing training to the host organizations, statewide program oversight and coordination, and maintain statewide program information.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 13.34 RCW to read as follows:

(1) A child welfare research entity based at the University of Washington shall conduct an evaluation of the parents for parents program. The evaluation design must meet the standards necessary to determine whether parents for parents can be considered a research-based program.

(2) A preliminary report to the legislature must be provided by December 1, 2016. At a minimum, the preliminary report must include statistics showing rates of attendance at court hearings and compliance with court-ordered services and visitation. The report must also address whether participation in the program affected participants' overall understanding of the dependency court process.

(3) A subsequent report must be delivered to the legislature by December 1, 2019. In addition to the information required under subsection (2) of this section, this report must include statistics demonstrating the effect of the program on reunification rates and lengths of time families were engaged in the dependency court system before achieving permanency.

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