

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1728

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

Title: An act relating to creating the parents for parents program.

Brief Description: Creating the parents for parents program.

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

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Early Learning & Human Services: 2/6/15, 2/10/15 [DPS];
Appropriations: 2/24/15, 2/26/15 [DP2S(w/o sub ELHS)].

Brief Summary of Second Substitute Bill

- Requires that the Parent for Parent (PFP) program be funded by a pass-through from the Office of Public Defense to a non-profit lead organization with extensive experience supporting veteran parents, subject to the availability of funds.
- Identifies the components of the PFP program to include outreach, support, education, and peer support groups for parents involved in the dependency court system.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & HUMAN SERVICES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Walkinshaw, Vice Chair; Walsh, Ranking Minority Member; Dent, Hawkins, Kilduff, Ortiz-Self, Sawyer and Senn.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Scott, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; McCaslin.

Staff: Luke Wickham (786-7146).

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.

Background:

Dependency Court System.

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) may file a petition in court alleging that a child should be a dependent of the state due to abuse, neglect, or because there is no parent, guardian, or custodian capable of adequately caring for the child.

If a court determines that a child is dependent, then the court will conduct periodic reviews and make determinations regarding the child's placement, the provision of services by the DSHS, compliance of the parents, and whether progress has been made by the parents.

Under certain circumstances after a child has been removed from the custody of a parent for at least six months pursuant to a finding of dependency, a petition may be filed seeking termination of parental rights.

Parents for Parents Program.

The goal of the Parents for Parents (PFP) program is to increase early engagement of birth parents newly entering the dependency process through education and peer support coordinated by birth parents, referred to as veteran parents, who have successfully navigated the child welfare system.

The PFP program currently exists in nine counties: Grays Harbor, Pacific, King, Kitsap, Pierce, Snohomish, Spokane, Thurston, and Mason.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Components of the PFP program are defined to include the following:

- outreach and support to parents at dependency-related hearings, beginning with the shelter care hearing;
- a class to educate parents on the dependency court process;
- ongoing support to help parents achieve their case plan; and
- structured, curriculum-based peer support groups.

"Child welfare parent mentor" is defined to mean a parent who has successfully resolved the issues that led the parent's child into the dependency court system, and who has an interest in working collaboratively to improve the lives of children and families.

Parent for Parent Organization.

Subject to the availability of funds, the PFP program must be funded by a pass-through from the Office of Public Defense to a non-profit lead organization with extensive experience supporting veteran parents. Through a contract with a lead organization, each local program must be administered by the county superior court or a nonprofit organization.

Local stakeholders representing child welfare systems must serve as PFP program advisors. A veteran parent lead must provide program coordination and maintain local program information.

The lead organization must provide:

- ongoing training to the host organizations;
- statewide program oversight and coordination; and
- maintain statewide program information.

Evaluation of Parent for Parent.

Subject to the availability of funds, a child welfare research entity must conduct an evaluation of the PFP program to determine whether the program can be considered a research-based program. A preliminary report must be submitted to the Legislature by December 1, 2016. A subsequent report must be delivered to the Legislature by December 1, 2019.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill indicates that the implementation of the PFP program and the evaluation of that program are subject to the availability of funds. The term "veteran parent" is replaced with the term "child welfare parent mentor" in the substitute bill. The substitute bill also eliminates the requirement that the evaluation be conducted by an entity at the University of Washington and requires that this evaluation be conducted by a research entity with experience in child welfare research.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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) This bill comes from the excitement of parents that want to share their support with other parents involved in the child welfare system. Even parents with a lot of support face challenges. Imagine if you are a parent with a young child and have challenges with substance abuse. Further imagine you are now in court after your child has been removed from you. As a parent you abstained from using your drug of choice for the last three days to prove that you are not using. Also, you sit through a two-hour hearing regarding your problems and why your child should be removed from you. Then imagine a parent comes to you and tells you that they have been in your shoes and were able to get their child back. The Washington Court Appointed Special Advocates supports the PFP program. The PFP program is able to engage parents early on in the process and leads to greater reunification rates and other positive outcomes. Having the PFP program statewide would make a difference in the child welfare system. With the support of a veteran parent, cases move faster toward permanency. The PFP program provides a ray of hope for individuals. Parents are often afraid and angry with social workers and other players in the child welfare system. Parent mentors can provide support that allows child welfare involved parents to

overcome their anger and work on correcting parental deficiencies. The PFP program provides services in nine counties for less than \$900,000 a year. Many parents have been volunteering for this PFP program, but these parents need to be paid. The Office of Public Defense would not take any administrative fee for this program, and would just pass the money through to a nonprofit lead organization. Evaluations have proven that the PFP program has led to increased reunification, which leads to savings. The PFP program is also identified as a promising program by the University of Washington. The PFP program has helped support many parents to allow them to reunify with their children. This PFP program helps parents minimize their stress and engage in the services they need to correct their parental deficiencies. The veteran parents that are providing support for parents in the child welfare system are provided training. There are 50 percent higher reunification rates for parents engaged in the PFP program. Currently, the PFP program receives about \$200,000 annually from the Children's Administration. Many child welfare-involved parents are scared. The PFP program provides support that allows parents to change their attitude to reunify with their children. The PFP program provides hope and purpose for many parents. The PFP program was implemented during the recession. At this time, the caseloads increased dramatically and the time for professionals plummeted during this period. Many parents credited their sobriety to support from veteran parents.

(Neutral) While the Office of Family and Children's Ombuds (OFCO) does not take a position on legislation, the intent of this bill is supported. The types of complaints that the OFCO receives demonstrates the need for this bill. There is a strong organizational structure in the bill to allow for successful implementation. Finally, there is an evaluation component to ensure the positive outcomes of this PFP program.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Ormsby, prime sponsor; Ryan Murrey, Washington State Court Appointed Special Advocates; Joanne Moore, Office of Public Defense; Alise Hegle, Washington State Parent Advocacy Committee; Mary Danner, Mark Hillman, John Martin, and Tonia Morrison, Parent for Parent; and Chris Williams, Court Appointed Special Advocates.

(Neutral) Patrick Dowd, Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The second substitute bill be substituted therefor and the second substitute bill do pass and do not pass the substitute bill by Committee on Early Learning & Human Services. Signed by 29 members: Representatives Hunter, Chair; Ormsby, Vice Chair; Chandler, Ranking Minority Member; Parker, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Wilcox, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Carlyle, Cody, Dent, Dunshee, Fagan, Haler, Hansen, Hudgins, G. Hunt, S. Hunt, Jinkins, Kagi, Lytton, MacEwen, Magendanz, Pettigrew, Sawyer, Senn, Springer, Stokesbary, Sullivan, Tharinger, Van Werven and Walkinshaw.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Buys, Condotta, Schmick and Taylor.

Staff: Meghan Bunch (786-7119).

Summary of Recommendation of Committee On Appropriations Compared to Recommendation of Committee On Early Learning & Human Services:

The second substitute clarifies that the duties of the Parents for Parents program are subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Second 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) The Parents for Parents program (PFP program) provides child welfare mentors to support parents through an unfamiliar and intimidating system. "Child welfare mentors" are parents who have personally experienced the dependency case process, allowing them to effectively counsel other parents. The dependency process and court system is extremely complex and many people are involved. With the help of mentors, parents learn how to expedite their cases and successfully navigate through the process.

The PFP program helps families get back together after difficult times. Some parents have been incarcerated and impoverished. Some parents have felt alone and without hope. Aside from navigating through the process of dependency cases, child welfare mentors have also provided guidance to parents to gain employment and find housing. The program provides hope and proves that parents can turn their lives around, with a little support.

Since 2011, some counties such as King County have seen an increase in dependencies filings. At the same time, there have been system-wide budget cuts. This program is an advantage for family courts. The state needs to strongly consider any program assisting in resolving cases.

In terms of the fiscal impacts, the PFP program already has a lot of positive feedback for a low cost. Washington court data on dependency dismissals shows parents in the PFP program are 50 percent more likely to reunify with their children. The PFP program lowers terminations of parental rights, and increases compliance with court orders and visitations. Engaging parents with their children saves the state money by lowering foster care stays and getting parents off assistance and out of poverty.

Current program contracts with the Children's Administration will end June 30, 2015. If this bill does not receive funding, the program will close. The Office of Public Defense (OPD) will not charge pass-through fees, but will provide oversight. Mentors are not paid with a

salary. They are only paid \$12 to \$15 an hour, and do not receive benefits for the most part. The mentors are on call on a volunteer basis.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Chris Mathies; Alise Hegle, Washington State Parent Advocacy Committee; Joanne Moore, Office of Public Defense; and Mark Hillman, King County Superior Court.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.