

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1365

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

Title: An act relating to increasing family engagement in the child welfare process through increasing the use of meeting facilitators.

Brief Description: Requiring the use of trained meeting facilitators in certain planning meetings involving children, parents, caregivers, and others.

Sponsors: Representatives Ortiz-Self, Pettigrew, Hargrove, Ryu, Lovick and Ormsby.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Early Learning & Human Services: 1/31/17, 2/7/17 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires that designated facilitators facilitate certain child welfare shared planning meetings unless the Department of Social and Health Services finds good cause to proceed without a facilitator.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & HUMAN SERVICES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Senn, Vice Chair; Frame, Goodman, Kilduff, Lovick and Ortiz-Self.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Dent, Ranking Minority Member; McDonald, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Klippert.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Griffey, McCaslin and Muri.

Staff: Luke Wickham (786-7146).

Background:

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.

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) holds shared planning meetings for families involved in the child welfare system. There are various types of meetings that occur in the child welfare context including: family team decision making meetings, shelter care case conferences, child health and education tracking meetings, permanency planning meetings, adoption planning meetings, placement staffings, mental health and substance abuse treatment planning, behavioral rehabilitative services meetings, 17.5 transition staffings, foster care assessment program meetings, tribal staffings, and end-of-life care meetings.

Generally, the assigned caseworker or supervisor must conduct the meeting, invite participants, provide remote participation options, and ask youth age 14 and older to identify at least two support persons to attend the meetings. During the meeting, the caseworker or supervisor will present the case history, provide the participants an opportunity to present information, identify family strengths and community and cultural supports, and address child safety, permanency, and well-being.

In certain circumstances, DSHS facilitators will lead the shared planning meetings, including conducting the meetings, and make invitations in a process seeking to build consensus using a standardized procedure. These facilitators are employees of the DSHS, but not the caseworker or supervisor assigned to the particular case.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The substitute bill requires that child welfare shared planning meeting facilitators:

- facilitate all child welfare family team decisionmaking, permanency planning staffing, and Behavioral Rehabilitation Services (BRS) staffing meetings unless the DSHS finds good cause to proceed without a facilitator;
- receive standardized training;
- emphasize child safety in consensus-based decision making and prioritize efforts toward family reunification when possible; and
- encourage biological parents to include foster parents, relative placements, or other placement resources in shared planning meetings.

Shared planning meetings are defined as any meeting that includes families, youth, relatives, fictive kin, natural supports, and others who can assist in a plan that prioritizes child safety and meets the support and service needs of parents, children, and caregivers.

A "facilitator" is defined as the trained person who leads the shared planning meeting process, and who may be an employee of the DSHS.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill limits the meetings for which facilitators must be used to family team decisionmaking, permanency planning staffing, and BRS staff meetings.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 26, 2017.

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) There is high turnover among caseworkers. There should be a consistent person to guide the shared planning meeting process. The more people that are at the table, the faster the process moves. There is a lot of interest in issues related to reunification including increasing the teamwork among those involved in a child welfare case. It is helpful to have an inclusive approach and families trust objective facilitators. Child welfare facilitators have a very good reputation as being objective and trustworthy. People who are identified as facilitators are not considered case-carrying, and those non-case-carrying positions were cut during the recession. Imagine that your children have been removed from you and the person who is organizing family meetings is the person with whom you are in conflict. Using facilitators will lead to faster reunification and adoption.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) The DSHS cannot support bills that are not included in the Governor's budget. The intent of the legislation is supported. The family team decision-making meetings are generally facilitated by a trained facilitator. It would be helpful to extend facilitators to all shared planning meetings, but these facilitators are stretched fairly thin. Caseworkers were skeptical about the effect of using facilitators at these meetings but were surprised by the effect of including family members and other friends of the family in these meetings. Often parents listened more carefully to those friends and family than to the DSHS employees. This job could be fulfilled by current DSHS employees, but the danger is that one of those jobs would be given short shrift. The only way to facilitate meetings effectively would be to have one individual focus on this. Another option for this would be to start using facilitators in certain areas. The fiscal note will provide greater detail on the number of shared planning meetings that occur.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Ortiz-Self, prime sponsor; and Laurie Lippold, Partners for Our Children.

(Other) Jennifer Strus, Department of Social and Health Services.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.