
Human Services & Early Learning Committee

HB 1631

Brief Description: Supporting child welfare workers.

Sponsors: Representatives Senn, Caldier, Entenman, Ortiz-Self, Frame, Slatter, Appleton, Corry, Goodman, Jinkins, Davis, Pollet and Leavitt.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires that the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) submit reports to the Legislature regarding workplace culture, a training improvement plan, and a workload model for standardized ratios for staff.
- Requires the DCYF provide self-care training for child welfare workers, and incorporate trauma-informed care and reflective supervision in training.
- Requires the DCYF create dedicated positions to assist with the caseload of child welfare workers following a critical incident.

Hearing Date: 2/5/19

Staff: Luke Wickham (786-7146).

Background:

Department of Children, Youth, and Families.

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) was created in 2017. In 2018 the DCYF assumed responsibility over child welfare and early learning functions previously held by the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) and the Department of Early Learning. On July 1, 2019, the DCYF assumes responsibility over juvenile justice programs currently administered by the DSHS.

Child Welfare Workers.

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.

Child welfare is defined as a continuum of services that keep children safe and provide support for families in caring for their children. Child welfare services in the state are provided by the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF). There are various social workers working for the DCYF that carry out child welfare related responsibilities, including those that work for Child Protective Services (CPS), Family Assessment Response (FAR), and Child and Family Welfare Services (CFWS). The official job classification for these DCYF employees is social service specialist.

Child welfare workers that assist families must have a bachelor's or master's degree. These DCYF employees must submit to a background check and complete core training requirements after being hired. The initial core training for child welfare workers spans eight weeks and includes learning in the classroom and in the field. The Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence, a collaboration between the University of Washington, the University of Washington Tacoma, and Eastern Washington University, provides this core training and ongoing training for child welfare workers.

Child Protective Services.

If an individual suspects that a child has been abused or neglected, that abuse or neglect can be reported to a CPS office or to law enforcement. There are many individuals who are identified in statute as mandated reporters of abuse or neglect.

The CPS will then determine whether the report of child abuse or neglect is credible and whether the report meets the sufficiency screening criteria:

- The victim must be under 18 years of age.
- The allegation must meet the definition of abuse or neglect.
- The alleged subject must have the role of parent/caregiver.

Family Assessment Response.

Reports of low to moderately low risk allegations of child abuse or neglect will receive a CPS FAR, where there is no indication of immediate danger. These reports require a 72-hour face to face contact with the child victim.

The FAR is an alternative to the traditional CPS investigation. The FAR services are voluntary, and no findings of abuse or neglect are made. The FAR cases must be closed within 45 calendar days from the date the intake was received unless the parent or caregiver receiving services consents to the case remaining open for up to 120 calendar days.

Dependency Court Process.

Anyone, including the DCYF, 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. A court will hold a shelter care hearing within 72 hours of the child's removal and determine if the child can return home. If the child remains out of the home, there will be a dependency fact-finding hearing within 75 days of the filing of the petition.

If the child is found to be dependent, the court will conduct periodic reviews. During this court process, a CFWS social worker will provide services to the family and assist the child in reunification and permanency efforts.

Summary of Bill:

The DCYF must provide a report on the department's current efforts to improve workplace culture to the Legislature by December 1, 2019.

The DCYF and any external entity providing training to child welfare workers must provide a report on the current child welfare worker training to the Legislature by September 1, 2019. Following this report, the DCYF must provide a training improvement plan to the Legislature by January 1, 2020.

Child welfare worker training must include self care for child welfare workers. Child welfare workers must support victims of domestic violence while those victims continue to care for their children, when possible.

The DCYF must implement a curriculum for supervisors, develop specialized training for child welfare workers, and incorporate trauma-informed care and reflective supervision in training.

The DCYF must create dedicated positions to assist with the caseload of child welfare workers that need to take leave or a reduction in caseload following a critical incident. The DCYF must provide a critical incident protocol and peer counseling for child welfare workers.

The DCYF must make a concerted effort to increase efficiency through reducing paperwork.

The DCYF must develop a scientifically based method for measuring direct service time of child welfare workers and contracted resources.

The DCYF must convene a technical workgroup to develop a workload model including standardized ratios for supervisors, clerical, and other child welfare worker support staff, and child welfare caseload ratios by case type and provide a report on this model by December 1, 2019.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 1, 2019.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.