

SENATE BILL REPORT

HB 1657

As of March 21, 2019

Title: An act relating to services provided by the office of homeless youth prevention and protection programs.

Brief Description: Concerning services provided by the office of homeless youth prevention and protection programs.

Sponsors: Representatives Callan, Eslick, Kilduff, Leavitt, Senn, Dolan, Lovick, Frame, Dent, Corry, Appleton, Ryu, Robinson, Jinkins, Goodman, Doglio, Fey, Macri, Ormsby and Davis; by request of Department of Commerce.

Brief History: Passed House: 3/01/19, 94-0.

Committee Activity: Housing Stability & Affordability: 3/20/19.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Authorizes the use of HOPE Centers for the placement of a child in need of services and removes the limit on HOPE beds statewide.
- Clarifies that street outreach services are available to both youth and unaccompanied young adults.
- Aligns licensing requirements for HOPE Centers, as well as staff education and experience requirements, with Department of Children, Youth, and Families licensing and staff requirements.
- Adds at least two youth representatives to the Office of Homeless Youth Prevention and Protection Programs advisory committee.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING STABILITY & AFFORDABILITY

Staff: Brandon Popovac (786-7465)

Background: In 2015, the Legislature created the Office of Homeless Youth Prevention and Protection Programs (OHY) within the Department of Commerce. OHY provides services for youth and young adults up to twenty-four years of age, including:

- the Independent Youth Housing Program, which provides rental assistance and case management for eligible youth who have aged out of the state foster care system;

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- street youth services;
- HOPE Centers; and
- crisis residential centers (CRCs), which are short-term, semi-secure and secure facilities for runaway youth and adolescents in conflict with their families.

HOPE Centers. HOPE Centers provide voluntary and temporary residential placements for youths under age eighteen. Youth residing in a HOPE Center receive a comprehensive assessment that may include referrals and permanency planning. A youth may stay in a HOPE Center for up to 30 calendar days. A HOPE Center can extend a stay, but not exceed 60 calendar days. HOPE Center administrators accompany a resident leaving the HOPE Center to attend school or other necessary appointments.

Street Youth Services. Street Youth Services provide voluntary and temporary residential placements for youths under age eighteen who live outdoors or in another unsafe location not intended for occupancy by the minor and who is not residing with the minor's parent or at the minor's legally authorized residence.

Office of Homeless Youth Prevention and Protection Programs Advisory Committee. OHY must regularly consult with an advisory committee, consisting of 12 members who are advocates, at least two legislators, at least two parent advocates, at least one representative from law enforcement, service providers, and other stakeholders knowledgeable in the provision of services to homeless youth and young adults, including the prevention of youth and young adult homelessness, the dependency system, and family reunification. The members of the advisory committee must be appointed by the Governor, except for the legislators who must be appointed by the speaker of the House of Representatives and the president of the Senate.

Child in Need of Services. A child in need of services (CHINS) is defined as a child under age eighteen who meets at least one of the following requirements:

- is beyond parental control such that the child's behavior endangers the health, safety, or welfare of the child or other person;
- has been reported to law enforcement as absent without consent for at least 24 consecutive hours from the parent's home, a CRC, an out-of-home placement, or a court-ordered placement on two or more separate occasions and has exhibited a serious substance abuse problem or behaviors that create a serious risk of harm to the health, safety, or welfare of the child or any other person;
- is in need of necessary services, including food, shelter, health care, clothing, educational, or services designed to maintain or reunite the family and lacks access to or has declined to utilize these services, and whose parents have evidenced continuing but unsuccessful efforts to maintain the family structure or are unable or unwilling to continue efforts to maintain the family structure; or
- is a sexually exploited child.

A child, parent, or guardian, or the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) may file a CHINS petition if:

- a serious conflict exists between the parent and child that cannot be resolved by delivery of services to the family during continued placement of the child in the parental home; and

- reasonable efforts have been made to prevent the need for removal of the child from the parental home.

Upon filing of a CHINS petition, the child may be placed by DCYF in a CRC, foster family home, group home facility, or any other suitable residence other than a HOPE Center.

Department of Children, Youth, and Families. Created by the Legislature in 2017, DCYF oversees several services previously offered through the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) and Department of Early Learning (DEL), including all programs from the Children's Administration in DSHS such as child protective services' investigations and family assessment response, and licensed foster care, and all DEL services. Beginning in July 2019, DCYF will administer programs offered by the Juvenile Rehabilitation Division and the Office of Juvenile Justice in DSHS.

Summary of Bill: DCYF may place a child in need of services in a HOPE Center upon the filing of a CHINS petition. The limit on the number of HOPE Center beds statewide is removed.

HOPE Center licensing and staff requirements are modified to align with such requirements under DCYF. HOPE centers must:

- have a license issued by DCYF with staff meeting DCYF licensing qualifications; and
- have a case manager, preferably with experience working with adolescents, to serve as a placement and liaison specialist.

HOPE Centers may use an on-site program manager who must be trained in the development needs of street youth and must work with the case manager.

Street youth services is clarified as street outreach services and further defined as a program that provides services and resources either directly or through referral to street youth and unaccompanied young adults. Specific services may include crisis intervention emergency supplies, case management, and referrals and be provided through community-based outreach and drop-in centers.

At least two youth representatives must be added to the OHY Advisory Committee.

Legislative findings are updated to include language addressing those circumstances when segregating youth and young adult programs is not a best practice.

Technical corrections are made in relevant provisions to correctly refer to DCYF.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The bill contains small changes with a big benefit to allow OHY to achieve a greater effectiveness. There are over 13,000 youth in our state between the ages of twelve and twenty-four who are experiencing homelessness, and we need to be there for them to help get them out of danger and break the cycle of poverty.

The bill makes modifications to OHY programs that accomplish three things. First, it makes it easier for youth and young adults to access services by allowing outreach services to extend to young adults ages eighteen through twenty-four and by permitting youth with a CHINS petition to access a HOPE bed. Second, by making services easier to access for young people, we are also making better use of the resources that OHY currently possesses. Third, the bill amplifies youth engagement in OHY's work by requiring that at least two members of the OHY Advisory Committee are youth representatives. All changes have been recommended directly by OHY service providers and young people.

There is better and more consistent support and accurate information when having a larger representation on boards from those with lived experience in homelessness. The governor and OHY leadership see that it is very important to prioritize youth voice, but it is not written into law. These board spots must be taken very seriously to achieve more diversity and less tokenization.

The bill will prevent a CHINS youth having to be placed in juvenile detention because of limited options by creating a legal pathway for young people experiencing crisis to stay in a shelter for an extended period of time if there is no other safe place to go. Additionally, advocates strongly support the other components of this bill, including changing street outreach eligibility to age twenty-four, aligning education requirements between licensing facilities, and adding another young person to the OHY Advisory Committee to be truly valued and heard as experts. Outreach is one of the best ways providers can build relationships with young people on the streets and connect them to services, but the large majority of young people on the streets are young adults not minors. Facility staff members with years of experience working with young people are just as effective as, if not more than, the staff with a master's degree but no experience. Current licensing requirements create barriers to both hiring and promoting talented staff.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Lisa Callan, Prime Sponsor; Maven Gardner, The Mockingbird Society; Shoshana Wineburg, Washington Coalition for Homeless Youth Advocacy (WACHYA); Kim Justice, Office of Homeless Youth and Department of Commerce.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.