

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5494

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Human Services, Reentry & Rehabilitation, February 5, 2020
Ways & Means, February 11, 2020

Title: An act relating to the baby court initiative.

Brief Description: Concerning the baby court initiative.

Sponsors: Senators Zeiger, Darneille, Walsh and Nguyen.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services, Reentry & Rehabilitation: 2/5/19, 2/7/19 [DPS-WM], 2/5/20, 2/5/20 [DP2S-WM].

Ways & Means: 2/19/19, 1/14/20 [w/oRec-HSRR], 2/10/20, 2/11/20 [DNP, DP3S, w/oRec].

Brief Summary of Third Substitute Bill

- Creates a process for applying for grant funds to support baby courts in two superior courts that serve both rural and urban populations by January 1, 2021 through the Administrative Office of the Courts' (AOC) Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Grant Program (grant program).
- Defines "baby court" as a therapeutic court that provides an intensive court process for families with a child under age three who has been found dependent.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES, REENTRY & REHABILITATION

Staff: Kelsey-anne Fung (786-7479)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: That Third Substitute Senate Bill No. 5494 be substituted therefor, and the third substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Rolfes, Chair; Frockt, Vice Chair, Operating, Capital Lead; Mullet, Capital Budget Cabinet; Braun, Ranking Member; Brown, Assistant Ranking Member, Operating; Honeyford, Assistant Ranking Member, Capital; Becker, Billig, Carlyle, Conway, Darneille, Hasegawa, Hunt, Keiser, Muzzall, Pedersen, Rivers, Van De Wege,

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Wagoner, Warnick and Wilson, L.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.
Signed by Senator Schoesler.

Minority Report: Do not pass.
Signed by Senator Dhingra.

Staff: Corban Nemeth (786-7736)

Background: In 2008, the Legislature created the Family and Juvenile Court Improvement grant program. The purpose of the program is to assist superior courts in improving their family and juvenile court systems, especially in dependency cases, with the goals of:

- assuring a stable and well-trained judiciary in family and juvenile law providing consistency of judicial officers hearing all of the proceedings in a case involving one family, especially in dependency cases; and
- ensuring judicial accountability in implementing specific principles and practices for family and juvenile court.

Summary of Bill (Third Substitute): A baby court is defined as a therapeutic court that provides an intensive court process for families with a child under age three who has been found dependent.

To be eligible for baby court, the parent must have a child under age three that is dependent at the time the case enters the court process. The case may remain in baby court after the child is age three or older if the child is still dependent.

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 on Second Substitute (Human Services, Reentry & Rehabilitation):

PRO: Baby court initiative has been operating in Pierce County Superior Court for three years and it has been a success. The data shows that children are reunited with their parents within one year. The baby court limits the docket to 20 cases, and the same lawyers, social workers, and judge stay on the case from beginning to end. This is an opportunity for the Legislature to fund a program that will get kids to their forever home, even if it is not with the parents. Having the cooperation and partnership with the foster parents make a huge difference.

Persons Testifying (Human Services, Reentry & Rehabilitation): PRO: John Hickman, Retired Superior Court Judge; sara salas, baby court.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Human Services, Reentry & Rehabilitation): No one.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Third Substitute (Ways & Means): *The committee recommended a different version of the bill than what was heard.* PRO: The early years of a child's life are critically important for wellbeing and emotional attachments. Baby courts take an innovative approach and utilize collaboration to

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: John R Hickman, Pierce County Baby Court; Julie Hoffman, Best for Babies (Amara); Maureen Sorenson, Amara Foster Care, Chief Community Officer.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Ways & Means): No one.