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**SUBSTITUTE HOUSE BILL 2525**

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**State of Washington**

**66th Legislature**

**2020 Regular Session**

**By** House Human Services & Early Learning (originally sponsored by Representatives Callan, Corry, Eslick, Springer, Orwall, Ortiz-Self, Shewmake, Goodman, Senn, Caldier, Dent, Leavitt, Davis, Doglio, J. Johnson, and Pollet)

READ FIRST TIME 02/03/20.

1 AN ACT Relating to establishing the family connections program;  
2 amending RCW 2.70.060, 2.70.070, 2.70.080, 2.70.090, and 74.13.802;  
3 adding a new section to chapter 74.13 RCW; creating a new section;  
4 and providing an expiration date.

5 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

6 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** (1) The legislature recognizes that the  
7 department of children, youth, and families is working to change the  
8 culture of foster care and transition to a prevention-based child  
9 welfare system. The family first prevention services act will help  
10 facilitate this transition by allowing states to use federal funds  
11 for preventative services.

12 (2) To successfully prevent future child abuse and neglect from  
13 occurring, and minimize the impact of removal, the department should  
14 help facilitate relationships between foster families and birth  
15 parents through creation of the family connections program to  
16 strengthen families and prevent future child trauma. The legislature  
17 intends that the family connections program will put the child first,  
18 work to reduce family trauma, and support the child by helping adults  
19 learn, share, and work on understanding how best to support the child  
20 together.

1 (3) All services provided by the family connections program  
2 should supplement the current responsibilities and services provided  
3 by the department of children, youth, and families to families, and  
4 the family connections program is not intended to assume any  
5 responsibilities currently held by the department of children, youth,  
6 and families.

7 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 74.13  
8 RCW to read as follows:

9 (1) Beginning September 1, 2020, the department shall contract  
10 with an external organization or organizations with experience  
11 serving youth or families receiving out-of-home care services to  
12 implement and operate the family connections program, which  
13 facilitates interaction between a parent of a child found to be  
14 dependent pursuant to chapter 13.34 RCW and in out-of-home care and  
15 the individual with whom the child is placed.

16 (2) The external organization or organizations contracted to  
17 implement and operate the family connections program shall implement  
18 and operate the family connections program in one location west of  
19 the crest of the Cascade mountains, and one location east of the  
20 crest of the Cascade mountains.

21 (3) Families may be referred to the family connections program by  
22 a caseworker, an attorney, a guardian ad litem as defined in RCW  
23 13.34.030, a parent ally, an office of public defense social worker,  
24 or the court.

25 (4) After receiving a referral, the family connections program  
26 shall determine whether an in-person meeting between a parent of a  
27 child found to be dependent pursuant to chapter 13.34 RCW and in out-  
28 of-home care and the individual with whom the child is placed is  
29 appropriate. If the family connections program determines that such a  
30 meeting is appropriate, the family connections program shall then  
31 determine whether:

32 (a) The parent of a child found to be dependent pursuant to  
33 chapter 13.34 RCW and in out-of-home care and the individual with  
34 whom the child is placed are willing to participate in an in-person  
35 meeting; and

36 (b) Safety concerns exist such that an in-person meeting should  
37 not occur.

38 (5) If the family connections program determines that an in-  
39 person meeting should occur following the analysis required by

1 subsection (4) of this section, the family connections program shall  
2 provide a referral to the family connections program team. The family  
3 connections program team shall include a parent ally and an  
4 experienced caregiver. After receiving a referral, the family  
5 connections program team shall:

6 (a) Ensure that the parent ally contact the parent to prepare for  
7 an in-person meeting between the parent and caregiver;

8 (b) Ensure that the experienced caregiver contact the caregiver  
9 to prepare for an in-person meeting between the parent and caregiver;

10 (c) Convene an in-person meeting between the parent and  
11 caregiver; and

12 (d) Provide ongoing support to the parent and caregiver following  
13 the in-person meeting.

14 (6) If the family connections program determines that an in-  
15 person meeting should not occur following the analysis required under  
16 subsection (4) of this section, the family connections program team  
17 shall facilitate the exchange of information between the parent and  
18 caregiver in an appropriate manner that does not include an in-person  
19 meeting. The format of this exchange of information may include  
20 written messages, phone calls, or videoconferencing. The family  
21 connections program shall routinely reevaluate whether an in-person  
22 meeting should occur using the analysis required under subsection (4)  
23 of this section.

24 (7) The department shall collect data and measure outcomes for  
25 families engaging in the family connections program. By September 1,  
26 2021, and in compliance with RCW 43.01.036, the department shall  
27 submit a report to the relevant committees of the legislature that  
28 details:

29 (a) Data collected for the family connections program;

30 (b) Outcomes for families engaging in the family connections  
31 program; and

32 (c) The department's plan on how to expand the family connections  
33 program statewide.

34 (8) The definitions in this subsection apply throughout this  
35 section:

36 (a) "Experienced caregiver" means:

37 (i) An individual who is or has received a foster-family home  
38 license pursuant to chapter 74.15 RCW or an equivalent license from  
39 another state; or

1 (ii) An individual who cared for a child who was removed from his  
2 or her parent pursuant to chapter 13.34 RCW and who has a kin  
3 relationship to that child pursuant to RCW 74.13.600.

4 (b) "Parent ally" has the same meaning as provided in RCW  
5 2.70.060.

6 (9) This section expires June 30, 2022.

7 **Sec. 3.** RCW 2.70.060 and 2015 c 117 s 2 are each amended to read  
8 as follows:

9 For the purposes of RCW 2.70.070 through ~~((2.70.100))~~ 2.70.090,  
10 "~~((child-welfare))~~ parent ~~((mentor))~~ ally" means a parent who has  
11 successfully resolved the issues that led the parent's child into the  
12 care of the juvenile dependency court system, resulting in family  
13 reunification or another permanency outcome, and who has an interest  
14 in working collaboratively to improve the lives of children and  
15 families.

16 **Sec. 4.** RCW 2.70.070 and 2015 c 117 s 3 are each amended to read  
17 as follows:

18 (1) The goal of the parents for parents program is to increase  
19 the permanency and well-being of children in foster care through peer  
20 mentoring that increases parental engagement and contributes to  
21 family reunification.

22 (2) The parents for parents program may provide structured peer  
23 mentoring for families entering the dependency court system,  
24 administered by ~~((child-welfare))~~ parent ~~((mentors))~~ allies.

25 **Sec. 5.** RCW 2.70.080 and 2015 c 117 s 4 are each amended to read  
26 as follows:

27 Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this  
28 specific purpose, components of the parents for parents program,  
29 provided by ~~((child-welfare))~~ parent ~~((mentors))~~ allies, may include:

30 (1) Outreach and support to parents at dependency-related  
31 hearings, beginning with the shelter care hearing;

32 (2) A class that educates parents about the dependency system  
33 they must navigate in order to have their children returned, empowers  
34 them with tools and resources they need to be successful with their  
35 case plan, and provides information that helps them understand and  
36 support the needs of their children;

1 (3) Ongoing individual peer support to help parents involved with  
2 the child welfare system;

3 (4) Structured, curriculum-based peer support groups.

4 **Sec. 6.** RCW 2.70.090 and 2018 c 58 s 66 are each amended to read  
5 as follows:

6 (1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this  
7 specific purpose, the parents for parents program shall be funded  
8 through the office of public defense and centrally administered  
9 through a pass-through to a Washington state nonprofit-lead  
10 organization that has extensive experience supporting ((child  
11 welfare)) parent ((mentors)) allies.

12 (2) Through the contract with the lead organization, each local  
13 program must be locally administered by the county superior court or  
14 a nonprofit organization that shall serve as the host organization.

15 (3) Local stakeholders representing key child welfare systems  
16 shall serve as parents for parents program advisors. Examples of  
17 local stakeholders include the department of children, youth, and  
18 families, the superior court, attorneys for the parents, assistant  
19 attorneys general, and court-appointed special advocates or guardians  
20 ad litem.

21 (4) A ((child-welfare)) parent ((mentor)) ally lead shall provide  
22 program coordination and maintain local program information.

23 (5) The lead organization shall provide ongoing training to the  
24 host organizations, statewide program oversight and coordination, and  
25 maintain statewide program information.

26 **Sec. 7.** RCW 74.13.802 and 2019 c 328 s 1 are each amended to  
27 read as follows:

28 (1) Beginning July 1, 2020, the department shall establish a  
29 child welfare housing assistance pilot program, which provides  
30 housing vouchers, rental assistance, navigation, and other support  
31 services to eligible families.

32 (a) The department shall operate or contract for the operation of  
33 the child welfare housing assistance pilot program under subsection  
34 (3) of this section in one county west of the crest of the Cascade  
35 mountain range and one county east of the crest of the Cascade  
36 mountain range.

1 (b) The child welfare housing assistance pilot program is  
2 intended to shorten the time that children remain in out-of-home  
3 care.

4 (2) A parent with a child who is dependent pursuant to chapter  
5 13.34 RCW and whose primary remaining barrier to reunification is the  
6 lack of appropriate housing is eligible for the child welfare housing  
7 assistance pilot program.

8 (3) The department shall contract with an outside entity or  
9 entities to operate the child welfare housing assistance pilot  
10 program. If no outside entity or entities are available to operate  
11 the program or specific parts of the program, the department may  
12 operate the program or the specific parts that are not operated by an  
13 outside entity.

14 (4) Families may be referred to the child welfare housing  
15 assistance pilot program by a caseworker, an attorney, a guardian ad  
16 litem as defined in chapter 13.34 RCW, a ((child-welfare)) parent  
17 ((mentor)) ally as defined in RCW 2.70.060, an office of public  
18 defense social worker, or the court.

19 (5) The department shall consult with a stakeholder group that  
20 must include, but is not limited to, the following:

21 (a) Parent allies;

22 (b) Parent attorneys and social workers managed by the office of  
23 public defense parent representation program;

24 (c) The department of commerce;

25 (d) Housing experts;

26 (e) Community-based organizations;

27 (f) Advocates; and

28 (g) Behavioral health providers.

29 (6) The stakeholder group established in subsection (5) of this  
30 section shall begin meeting after July 28, 2019, and assist the  
31 department in design of the child welfare housing assistance pilot  
32 program in areas including, but not limited to:

33 (a) Equitable racial, geographic, ethnic, and gender distribution  
34 of program support;

35 (b) Eligibility criteria;

36 (c) Creating a definition of homeless for purposes of eligibility  
37 for the program; and

38 (d) Options for program design that include outside entities  
39 operating the entire program or specific parts of the program.

1           (7) By December 1, 2021, the department shall report outcomes for  
2 the child welfare housing assistance pilot program to the oversight  
3 board for children, youth, and families established pursuant to RCW  
4 43.216.015. The report must include racial, geographic, ethnic, and  
5 gender distribution of program support.

6           (8) The child welfare housing assistance pilot program  
7 established in this section is subject to the availability of funds  
8 appropriated for this purpose.

9           (9) This section expires June 30, 2022.

--- **END** ---