
THIRD SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 5494

State of Washington

66th Legislature

2020 Regular Session

By Senate Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Zeiger, Darneille, Walsh, and Nguyen)

READ FIRST TIME 02/11/20.

1 AN ACT Relating to the baby court initiative; adding a new
2 section to chapter 2.30 RCW; and creating a new section.

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

4 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature recognizes that a critical
5 need exists for child and family services programs to prevent the
6 incidence of child abuse, neglect, and endangerment. These programs
7 also need to minimize the incidence of childhood trauma on small
8 children and provide stability to parents and children within the
9 state. It is the intent of the legislature to create an initiative to
10 support early interventions with parents of young children who are
11 found to be dependent.

12 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 2.30 RCW
13 to read as follows:

14 (1) As used in this section, "baby court" means a therapeutic
15 court as defined in this chapter that provides an intensive court
16 process for families with a child under age three who has been found
17 dependent pursuant to chapter 13.34 RCW. To be eligible for baby
18 court, a parent must have a child under age three that is dependent
19 pursuant to chapter 13.34 RCW at the time the case enters the baby
20 court process. The case may remain in baby court after the child is

1 age three or older if the child is still dependent pursuant to
2 chapter 13.34 RCW. A baby court must:

3 (a) Establish a process for parents to voluntarily participate in
4 baby court;

5 (b) Review at least every three months whether the parent or
6 parents are actively engaged and adequately progressing toward
7 achieving the case plan, unless the court finds good cause;

8 (c) Order the department of children, youth, and families to
9 provide access to reasonably available and appropriate remedial
10 services designed to remedy identified parental deficiencies;

11 (d) Aim to reduce the length of removal of young children from
12 parents and reunify young children with parents according to the
13 child's best interests;

14 (e) Make decisions aimed to reduce incidences of abuse and
15 neglect among young children;

16 (f) Make decisions aimed to reduce the long-term and short-term
17 effects of traumatic experiences on the brain development of young
18 children; and

19 (g) Promote effective interaction and the use of resources among
20 the court and public and private child and family services providers.

21 (2) The family and juvenile court improvement grant program
22 established in RCW 2.56.220 shall:

23 (a) Develop standards for baby courts;

24 (b) Develop a process where any superior court, and not just
25 those receiving grant funds under RCW 2.56.230, may apply for grant
26 funds from the family and juvenile court improvement grant program
27 created in RCW 2.56.220 to establish a baby court;

28 (c) By January 1, 2021, distribute grant funds to support baby
29 courts in two superior courts that serve both rural and urban
30 populations;

31 (d) Give priority to superior courts that will commit additional
32 funding from public or private sources to its baby court;

33 (e) Prohibit using grant funds to supplant any existing funds
34 used to support a baby court, including existing family and juvenile
35 court improvement grants;

36 (f) Develop and define the outcome measures for baby courts;

37 (g) Collect outcome measure data that is included in an annual
38 report that must be submitted to fiscal committees of the legislature
39 beginning December 1, 2022. This annual report must summarize the
40 results of baby courts during the previous year, including data on

1 the outcomes achieved in baby courts compared to the outcomes
2 achieved by general dependency courts, and any cost savings
3 associated with achieving the goals established for baby courts in
4 subsection (1) of this section; and

5 (h) Sponsor and coordinate training for judicial officers and
6 other professionals that participate in baby courts receiving grant
7 funding pursuant to this section.

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