

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1186

As Reported by House Committee On:
Human Services, Youth, & Early Learning
Appropriations

Title: An act relating to making permanent and expanding the child welfare housing assistance program.

Brief Description: Making permanent and expanding the child welfare housing assistance program.

Sponsors: Representatives Rule, Ramel, Callan, Doglio, Macri, Simmons, Timmons, Reeves, Thai, Wylie, Stonier, Davis and Ormsby; by request of Department of Children, Youth, and Families.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Human Services, Youth, & Early Learning: 1/17/23, 1/27/23 [DPS];

Appropriations: 2/8/23, 2/13/23 [DP2S(w/o sub HSEL)].

Brief Summary of Second Substitute Bill

- Establishes the Child Welfare Housing Assistance Program (pilot) as a permanent program instead of a pilot expiring on June 30, 2023.
- Expands eligibility for the pilot.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES, YOUTH, & EARLY LEARNING

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Senn, Chair; Cortes, Vice Chair; Taylor, Vice Chair; Eslick, Ranking Minority Member; Couture, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Callan, Goodman, Ortiz-Self and Rule.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Dent

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.

and Walsh.

Staff: Luke Wickham (786-7146).

Background:

Child Welfare Housing Assistance Pilot Program.

The Child Welfare Housing Assistance Pilot Program (pilot) was authorized to begin July 1, 2020, and provides housing vouchers, rental assistance, navigation, and other support services to eligible families.

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) is required to operate or contract for the operation of the pilot, and contracted with Reliable Enterprise located in Lewis County to operate the pilot.

A parent with a child who is dependent and whose primary remaining barrier to reunification is the lack of appropriate housing is eligible for the pilot. A total of 123 families have received housing vouchers or other assistance through the pilot. Currently, there is a waitlist of 40 families interested in receiving assistance through the pilot.

The pilot is scheduled to expire June 30, 2023.

Candidate for Foster Care.

A child who is a candidate for foster care is a child who the DCYF identifies as being at imminent risk of entering foster care, but who can remain safely in the child's home or in a kinship placement as long as services or programs that are necessary to prevent entry of the child into foster care are provided. This includes a child whose adoption or guardianship arrangement is at risk of a disruption or dissolution that would result in a foster care placement.

A child is a candidate for foster care when:

- the child has been abandoned by the parent and the child's health, safety, and welfare is seriously endangered as a result;
- the child has been abused or neglected and the child's health, safety, and welfare is seriously endangered as a result;
- there is no parent capable of meeting the child's needs such that the child is in circumstances that constitute a serious danger to the child's development; and
- the child is otherwise at imminent risk of harm.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The Child Welfare Housing Assistance Program (Program) is established as a permanent program instead of a pilot program with an expiration date of June 30, 2023. The Program

is expanded to serve one or more counties on the east and west sides of the Cascade Mountains.

The eligibility for the Program is expanded to include:

- a parent with a child who is dependent and a lack of appropriate housing is a remaining barrier to reunification; and
- a parent of a child who is a candidate for foster care and whose housing instability is a barrier to the child remaining in the home.

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) must contract with an outside entity or entities who have a demonstrated understanding of the importance of stable housing for children and families involved or at risk of being involved with the child welfare system to operate the Program.

The reporting requirement for the DCYF is modified to require the report on the Program to:

- occur annually (instead of biennially) beginning November 1, 2024, and include data (not just outcomes);
- be provided to the Legislature (instead of the Legislature and the Governor, in the underlying bill);
- include information, when available, regarding distribution of the Program by race, geography, ethnicity, and gender, including a discussion of whether this distribution was equitable; and
- include any recommendations for legislative changes to the Program.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill modifies the reporting requirement for the Department of Children, Youth, and Families to require the report on the Child Welfare Housing Assistance Program (Program) to:

- occur annually (instead of biennially) beginning November 1, 2024, and include data (not just outcomes);
- be provided to the Legislature (instead of the Legislature and the Governor, in the underlying bill);
- include information, when available, regarding distribution of the Program by race, geography, ethnicity, and gender, including a discussion of whether this distribution was equitable; and
- include any recommendations for legislative changes to the Program.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect on June 30, 2023.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) There is a housing crisis. This can happen because of poverty. Removing children just because of poverty is not the best approach. In the past, too many children were removed from parents. Removal is a trauma in and of itself. This bill relates to housing and poverty.

This bill supports housing for children and families and does not address other issues. There should be an early investment in housing to prevent family crisis.

There are families that are so focused on making ends meet and supporting a family that some housing needs can be neglected, which can lead to the removal of children. Institutional care is extremely expensive. Housing programs can prevent removal, which leads to trauma and great expense.

This legislation creates an innovative partnership between housing authorities and the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF). Housing authorities have been working to develop a program with the DCYF, and this bill would support that effort.

This bill would help make Washington more competitive on receiving matching federal housing grants.

This is a smart investment and the right thing to do. This bill supports the most vulnerable population.

Domestic violence is the biggest cause of homelessness for children and women. Programs like this help reduce the amount of time that children are separated from their families. This program is incredibly important for survivors of domestic violence attempting to flee their perpetrators.

Lack of housing impacts reunification. This program is more cost-effective than out-of-home care.

Many children end up homeless after exiting child welfare services. The housing authorities have committed vouchers worth around \$60 million to child welfare involved families, but these vouchers are only available if the DCYF commits to providing supportive services.

When a child comes into care, the goal is to reunify families. To do this, services are delivered. These services create a pathway to reunification. These children also need a place to live.

There are a number of occasions where people engage in services and the only thing needed is appropriate housing. It can take many months for families to get housing.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Alicia Rule, prime sponsor; Nicholas Carr, Association of Washington Housing Authorities; Allison Krutsinger, Department of Children, Youth, and Families; Sarah Kendall, Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence; Janet Hedgepath, League of Women Voters Washington; Michael Mirra, Administrative Office of the Courts Steering Committee for Family Treatment Courts; Shane Silverthorn, Yakima County Superior Court; Carol Mitchell, Institute for Black Justice; Kelly Warner-King, Administrative Office of the Courts; and Heather Cantamessa, Children's Home Society of Washington.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The second substitute bill be substituted therefor and the second substitute bill do pass and do not pass the substitute bill by Committee on Human Services, Youth, & Early Learning. Signed by 29 members: Representatives Ormsby, Chair; Bergquist, Vice Chair; Gregerson, Vice Chair; Macri, Vice Chair; Stokesbary, Ranking Minority Member; Chambers, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Corry, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Berg, Chopp, Connors, Couture, Davis, Dye, Fitzgibbon, Hansen, Harris, Lekanoff, Pollet, Rude, Ryu, Sandlin, Schmick, Senn, Simmons, Slatter, Springer, Steele, Stonier and Tharinger.

Staff: Jackie Wheeler (786-7125).

Summary of Recommendation of Committee On Appropriations Compared to Recommendation of Committee On Human Services, Youth, & Early Learning:

The Appropriations Committee added a null and void clause, making the bill null and void unless funded in the budget.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Second Substitute Bill: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect on June 30, 2023. However, the bill is null and void unless funded in the budget.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) There is a need for a statewide program to address housing for separated families and those at risk of separation who are involved in the child welfare system. The national data suggests that an estimated 30 percent of all foster care placements could be shortened or avoided with a provision of adequate housing assistance. One potential reason we see lack of housing is because of domestic violence where the perpetrator was the main provider. Parents have had to give up safe and stable housing to access court-ordered services and then are denied reunification due to lack of housing or housing that is deemed inappropriate. Some are having to choose between children coming home because subsidized housing limits age and number of children in the family. Family size is also a barrier as it is challenging to house three or four kids in a studio apartment.

Families need access to funding for single-family housing so parents can work on the real issues, including their family's safety and security. Lack of housing hinders progress, delays reunification, and costs the state money. The cost per child in out-of-home care is significantly more than paying for one roof over their heads per month. This bill would make the child welfare housing assistance program permanent and, when combined with legislative appropriations, would allow for a partnership between housing authorities, nonprofits, service providers, and the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF). The goal is to ensure that DCYF case workers have resources available when they need them to prevent or shorten unnecessary separations. The dedicated federal housing vouchers that have been preliminarily committed to this effort are valued at more than \$26 million per year. This is a smart investment that Washington can lead the way on and bring families together.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Andrew Calkins, Association of Washington Housing Authorities and King County Housing Authority; Heather Cantamessa, Children's Home Society of Washington; Sharonda Amamilo, Thurston County Superior Court; and Shane Silverthorn.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.