

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1970

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

Title: An act relating to improving communication between the department of children, youth, and families and caregivers.

Brief Description: Improving communication between the department of children, youth, and families and caregivers.

Sponsors: Representatives McClintock, Couture, Waters, Graham, Cheney, Sandlin, Harris and Caldier.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Human Services, Youth, & Early Learning: 1/17/24, 1/26/24 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) to establish a caregiver communication specialist position within the DCYF for the purpose of improving communication between the DCYF and caregivers caring for children receiving child welfare services.
- Requires the DCYF to submit a report describing how to implement an automated notification system that would provide electronic or telephonic notification to caregivers of children receiving child welfare services and providing recommendations regarding improving communications between the DCYF and caregivers.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES, YOUTH, & EARLY LEARNING

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Senn, Chair; Cortes, Vice Chair; Rule, Vice Chair; Eslick, Ranking Minority Member; Couture, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Callan,

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.

Dent, Goodman, Ortiz-Self and Taylor.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Walsh.

Staff: Omeara Harrington (786-7136).

Background:

Child welfare services refer to an array of services, including voluntary and in-home services, out-of-home care, case management, and adoption services, which strengthen, supplement, or substitute for, parental care and supervision for the purpose of preventing or remedying problems which may result in family conflict, neglect, or abuse, and providing adequate care for children away from their homes in foster homes, day care, or other child care agencies or facilities. The investigation into whether child abuse or neglect occurred, referred to as child protective services, is not considered a child welfare service.

Caregivers caring for a child receiving child welfare services could include parents, relatives, or other suitable persons, foster parents, and group homes.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) must establish a caregiver communication specialist position within the DCYF for the purpose of improving communication between the DCYF and caregivers. The Caregiver Communication Specialist position is responsible for developing policies for sharing appropriate and timely information with caregivers of children receiving child welfare services, and for supporting coordination between existing caregiver engagement teams, constituent relations, communications specialists, and child welfare field offices.

By October 1, 2025, the DCYF must submit a report to the Legislature and the Governor describing:

- how the DCYF could implement an automated notification system that would provide electronic or telephonic notification to caregivers of children receiving child welfare services regarding upcoming changes in placement, court hearings, or other relevant information;
- any statutory, policy, or funding changes needed to accomplish this notification system; and
- recommendations regarding improving communications between the DCYF and caregivers. The DCYF must consult with the caregiver communication specialist, current and former caregivers, and youth who received or are receiving child welfare services regarding these recommendations.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill removes the requirement that the caregiver communication specialist assist caseworkers in promptly communicating with caregivers of children receiving child welfare services.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 11, 2024.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This bill creates a caregiver communication specialist role within the DCYF for caregivers of children in child welfare. It also requires the DCYF to submit a report on the feasibility of an automatic notice system for upcoming hearings. For families trying to navigate this process, there are many touchpoints within the DCYF system and not everyone is communicating. A point of contact where the information is shared would be helpful. The DCYF is a new agency and is a work in progress, and there is no blame on the caseworkers who are doing what they can, with what they have. This is an effort to streamline the process for families and involved kids. Foster parents have been informed after the fact of court decisions affecting their foster children that they were not initially made aware of. It is very difficult to get information about court hearings that foster parents want to attend. Social workers get annoyed with inquiries. An automated notification system would further foster parents' rights without unduly burdening those working in the system.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Stephanie McClintock, prime sponsor; and Christina Faucett.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.