

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## 2SHB 1204

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As Passed Senate, April 10, 2023

**Title:** An act relating to implementing the family connections program.

**Brief Description:** Implementing the family connections program.

**Sponsors:** House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Callan, Eslick, Leavitt, Bateman, Kloba, Reed, Simmons, Doglio, Goodman, Ortiz-Self, McEntire, Davis and Pollet; by request of Department of Children, Youth, and Families).

**Brief History:** Passed House: 2/27/23, 95-0.

**Committee Activity:** Human Services: 3/09/23, 3/14/23 [DP-WM].

Ways & Means: 3/21/23, 4/04/23 [DP, w/oRec].

**Floor Activity:** Passed Senate: 4/10/23, 49-0.

### Brief Summary of Bill

- Makes the Family Connections Program permanent, instead of expiring June 30, 2023, subject to appropriation.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

**Majority Report:** Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Wilson, C., Chair; Kauffman, Vice Chair; Boehnke, Ranking Member; Frame, Nguyen, Warnick and Wilson, J..

**Staff:** Alison Mendiola (786-7488)

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

**Majority Report:** Do pass.

Signed by Senators Rolfes, Chair; Robinson, Vice Chair, Operating & Revenue;

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Mullet, Vice Chair, Capital; Wilson, L., Ranking Member, Operating; Gildon, Assistant Ranking Member, Operating; Rivers, Assistant Ranking Member, Capital; Warnick, Assistant Ranking Member, Capital; Billig, Boehnke, Braun, Conway, Dhingra, Hasegawa, Hunt, Keiser, Muzzall, Nguyen, Pedersen, Saldaña, Torres, Van De Wege, Wagoner and Wellman.

**Minority Report:** That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senator Schoesler, Ranking Member, Capital.

**Staff:** Joshua Hinman (786-7281)

**Background:** In 2020, the Legislature created the Family Connections Program (FCP), directing the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) to contract with an external organization or organizations with experience serving youth or families receiving out-of-home care services to implement and operate FCP.

The purpose of FCP is to strengthen families, and prevent future child trauma by facilitating communication, where appropriate, between foster families and birth families when a child is dependent and in out-of-home care.

Families may be referred to FCP by a DCYF caseworker, an attorney, a guardian ad litem, a parent ally, an Office of Public Defense social worker, or the court.

After receiving a referral, FCP determines whether an in-person meeting between the two parties is appropriate. If FCP determines an in-person meeting should occur, they must provide a referral to the FCP team, which must:

- ensure that the parent ally contact the parent to prepare for an in-person meeting between the parent and caregiver;
- ensure that the experienced caregiver contact the caregiver to prepare for an in-person meeting between the parent and caregiver;
- convene an in-person meeting between the parent and caregiver; and
- provide ongoing support to the parent and caregiver following the in-person meeting.

Amara operates the FCP in Clark, Grays Harbor, King, Kitsap, Mason, Pacific, Pierce and Skamania counties. Since the inception of the program, 13 FCP meetings have been held, 66 parents have met with a peer mentor, and 90 caregivers have met with a peer mentor.

**Summary of Bill:** FCP is made permanent, subject to appropriation, instead of expiring June 30, 2023. The external organization or organizations contracted to implement and operate FCP is to do so in one or more locations in both eastern and western Washington.

The referral process to the FCP is expanded to allow referral in any manner determined appropriate by the FCP, including referrals by the parent or caregiver.

**Appropriation:** The bill contains a null and void clause requiring specific funding be provided in an omnibus appropriation act.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members:** No.

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

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Human Services):** PRO: This bill aims to support the child and reduce the trauma they go through when in out-of-home care. This bill removes barriers between foster parents and bioparents. When children see adults in their life getting along, it helps create stability in their lives. Many foster parents don't know how to create connections between them and their bioparents which is what this program does, often with lasting results.

**Persons Testifying (Human Services):** PRO: Representative Lisa Callan, Prime Sponsor; Fiona Lloyd-Muller, Amara; Amy Jacobsen; Allison Krutsinger, Dept of Children, Youth, and Families.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Human Services):** No one.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Ways & Means):** PRO: This bill makes the FCP permanent on both sides of the mountains. The FCP focuses on parents and caregivers and collaborative relationships. When parents and caregivers work together, we see reduction in cost. Examples include reducing stress on social workers and the court system by encouraging a relationship between conflicting parties. This reduces staff stress and increases caregiver retention.

Testifier is a long time supporter of FCP. It is a diverse system of community partners. Advisory council is a space for oversight and constructive feedback, which includes data and progress reports that shape implementation in the spirit of continuous quality improvement. FCP is a wonderful and amazing program.

**Persons Testifying (Ways & Means):** PRO: Katie Biron, Amara; Kelly Warner-King.

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