

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 1970

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Human Services, February 20, 2024

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: House Committee on Human Services, Youth, & Early Learning (originally sponsored by Representatives McClintock, Couture, Waters, Graham, Cheney, Sandlin, Harris and Caldier).

Brief History: Passed House: 2/12/24, 97-0.

Committee Activity: Human Services: 2/19/24, 2/20/24 [DP-WM].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) to establish a caregiver communication specialist position within DCYF for the purpose of improving communication between DCYF and caregivers caring for children receiving child welfare services.
- Requires DCYF to submit a report to the Legislature by October 1, 2025, describing how to implement an automated notification system that would notify caregivers of children receiving child welfare services and providing recommendations regarding improving communications between DCYF and caregivers.

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

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Member; Frame, Nguyen, Warnick and Wilson, J..

Staff: Alison Mendiola (786-7488)

Background: Child welfare services refer to 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. An 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 Bill: The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) is to establish a caregiver communication specialist position within DCYF for the purpose of improving communication between DCYF and caregivers. The caregiver communication specialist is responsible for:

- developing policies for sharing appropriate and timely information with caregivers of children receiving welfare services; and
- supporting coordination between existing engagement teams, constituent relations, communications specialists, and child welfare field offices.

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

- how DCYF could implement an automated notification system that would provide electronic or telephonic notifications to caregivers regarding upcoming changes in placements for the child, court hearings, or other relevant and appropriate information;
- any statutory, policy, or funding changes need to accomplish creating an automated notification system; and
- recommendations regarding improving communications between DCYF and caregivers. DCYF is to consult with the caregiver communications specialist, current and former caregivers, and youth who received or are receiving child welfare services regarding these recommendations.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Social workers have large caseloads and many people are working on cases at the same time, so having a centralized location for sharing important information would help everyone involved know what is going on and help streamline the system. Creating this system is just scratching the surface and hopefully sparks problem solving and streamlines procedures going forward.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Stephanie McClintock, Prime Sponsor.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.