

FINAL BILL REPORT

SSB 5256

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Synopsis as Enacted

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

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Human Services (originally sponsored by Senators Saldaña, Wilson, C., Frame, Hasegawa, Hunt, Kuderer, Lovelett, Lovick, Nguyen, Nobles, Robinson, Valdez and Wellman; by request of Department of Children, Youth, and Families).

Senate Committee on Human Services
Senate Committee on Ways & Means
House Committee on Human Services, Youth, & Early Learning
House Committee on Appropriations

Background: Child Welfare Housing Assistance Pilot Program. In 2019, the Legislature passed 2SSB 5718 which directed the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) to establish the Child Welfare Housing Assistance Pilot Program (CWHAPP) to provide housing vouchers, rental assistance, navigation, and other support services to eligible families. The purpose of the program is to shorten the time children remain in out-of-home care. This program is limited to two pilots—one county in Eastern Washington and one county in Western Washington. The CWHAPP was to expire in June 30, 2022, and was subsequently funded for another year through ESSB 5693 (2022).

Eligibility. A parent with a child who is dependent, and whose primary remaining barrier to reunification is the lack of appropriate housing, is eligible for CWHAPP. Families may be referred to CWHAPP by a caseworker, an attorney, a guardian ad litem, a child welfare parent mentor, an Office of Public Defense social worker, or the court.

On March 1, 2022 DCYF submitted a report on the program's outcomes to the Legislature. At the time of the report, six families—including 15 family members—have been housed, and another 29 families have been provided case management, including orientation; housing application support; connections to employment services; connections to medical, behavioral, and personal support; accessing and transferring personal documents; creating

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partnerships, and other services that build trust. Of the 34 adults served with case management, representing 29 families, which included 90 children, the majority, nearly 75 percent, identified themselves through the application process as White. Among the other nine participants, two identified themselves as American Indian or Alaska Native, one identified themselves as Black or African American, and five chose not respond to the question. DCYF did not collect information on Hispanic/Latino heritage. The gender distribution for adults was approximately two-thirds female and one-third male.

DCYF recommends that the CWHAPP should:

- serve reunifying families earlier, and should serve other families to prevent removal or deeper Child Protective Services involvement; and
- be offered statewide or, at a minimum, continued as a pilot, due to COVID-related impacts, noting the disruptive effect of COVID-19, an underlying lack of housing stock, a slow start getting referrals, and a lack of positive experiences of both property owners and DCYF client families with housing case management which all caused delays in implementation.

Summary: DCYF must administer the Child Welfare Housing Program (Program), in one or more counties in eastern and western Washington, within funds appropriated for this specific purpose. The Program is intended to reduce the need for foster care placement and to shorten the time children remain in out-of-home care when placement is necessary.

The following families are eligible for assistance from the Program:

- a parent with a child who is a 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.

DCYF must contract with an outside entity or entities who must 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.

Annually, beginning November 1, 2024, DCYF shall report to the Legislature and the Governor, at a minimum when available, the distribution of the Program by race, geography, ethnicity, and gender including a discussion of whether this distribution is equitable, and include any recommendations for legislative changes to the Program.

Votes on Final Passage:

Senate	48	0	
House	94	3	(House amended)
Senate	49	0	(Senate concurred)

Effective: June 30, 2023