

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5426

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As of January 30, 2023

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

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

**Sponsors:** Senators Kauffman, Wilson, C., Kuderer, Lovelett, Lovick, Salomon and Valdez; by request of Department of Children, Youth, and Families.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Human Services: 1/30/23.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

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

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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

**Background:** In 2020, the Legislature created the Family Connections Program (FCP), directing the Department of Children, Youth and Families 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. After receiving a referral, FCP is to determine 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;

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*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.*

- 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, within available funding, 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.

**Appropriation:** None.

**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:** PRO: The Family Connections Program promotes communication between a parent and caregiver who can sometimes have strained relationships. Working together prevents future trauma to the child in out-of-home care. Parents and caregivers receive peer support before the meetings as well as ongoing support. Hundreds of people over eight counties have been assisted to date. The goal is to make this a standard practice for all families with children in an out-of-home placement.

These relationships and bonds can continue for a long time, well past the dependency. This program assists adults in working together as a team for the child.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator Claudia Kauffman, Prime Sponsor; Katie Biron, Amara; Leroy Pascubillo, Amara; Celina Rivera, Amara.

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