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HOUSE BILL 1204

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State of Washington

68th Legislature

2023 Regular Session

**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

Read first time 01/10/23. Referred to Committee on Human Services, Youth, & Early Learning.

1 AN ACT Relating to implementing the family connections program;  
2 amending RCW 74.13.715; providing an effective date; and declaring an  
3 emergency.

4 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

5 **Sec. 1.** RCW 74.13.715 and 2021 c 334 s 990 are each amended to  
6 read as follows:

7 (1) (~~Beginning September 1, 2020~~) Within available funding, the  
8 department shall contract with an external organization or  
9 organizations with experience serving youth or families receiving  
10 out-of-home care services to implement and operate the family  
11 connections program, which facilitates interaction between a parent  
12 of a child found to be dependent pursuant to chapter 13.34 RCW and in  
13 out-of-home care and the individual with whom the child is placed.

14 (2) The external organization or organizations contracted to  
15 implement and operate the family connections program shall implement  
16 and operate the family connections program in one or more locations  
17 west of the crest of the Cascade mountains, and one or more locations  
18 east of the crest of the Cascade mountains.

19 (3) Families may be referred to the family connections program by  
20 a department caseworker, an attorney, a guardian ad litem as defined

1 in RCW 13.34.030, a parent ally, an office of public defense social  
2 worker, or the court.

3 (4) After receiving a referral, the family connections program  
4 shall determine whether an in-person meeting between a parent of a  
5 child found to be dependent pursuant to chapter 13.34 RCW and in out-  
6 of-home care and the individual with whom the child is placed is  
7 appropriate. If the family connections program determines that such a  
8 meeting is appropriate, the family connections program shall then  
9 determine whether:

10 (a) The parent of a child found to be dependent pursuant to  
11 chapter 13.34 RCW and in out-of-home care and the individual with  
12 whom the child is placed are willing to participate in an in-person  
13 meeting; and

14 (b) Safety concerns exist such that an in-person meeting should  
15 not occur.

16 (5) If the family connections program determines that an in-  
17 person meeting should occur following the analysis required by  
18 subsection (4) of this section, the family connections program shall  
19 provide a referral to the family connections program team. The family  
20 connections program team shall include a parent ally and an  
21 experienced caregiver. After receiving a referral, the family  
22 connections program team shall:

23 (a) Ensure that the parent ally contact the parent to prepare for  
24 an in-person meeting between the parent and caregiver;

25 (b) Ensure that the experienced caregiver contact the caregiver  
26 to prepare for an in-person meeting between the parent and caregiver;

27 (c) Convene an in-person meeting between the parent and  
28 caregiver; and

29 (d) Provide ongoing support to the parent and caregiver following  
30 the in-person meeting.

31 (6) If the family connections program determines that an in-  
32 person meeting should not occur following the analysis required under  
33 subsection (4) of this section, the family connections program team  
34 shall facilitate the exchange of information between the parent and  
35 caregiver in an appropriate manner that does not include an in-person  
36 meeting. The format of this exchange of information may include  
37 written messages, phone calls, or videoconferencing. The family  
38 connections program shall routinely reevaluate whether an in-person  
39 meeting should occur using the analysis required under subsection (4)  
40 of this section.

1 (7) The department shall collect data and measure outcomes for  
2 families engaging in the family connections program. By September 1,  
3 2021, and in compliance with RCW 43.01.036, the department shall  
4 submit a report to the relevant committees of the legislature that  
5 details:

6 (a) Data collected for the family connections program;

7 (b) Outcomes for families engaging in the family connections  
8 program; and

9 (c) The department's plan on how to expand the family connections  
10 program statewide.

11 (8) The definitions in this subsection apply throughout this  
12 section:

13 (a) "Experienced caregiver" means:

14 (i) An individual who is or has received a foster family home  
15 license pursuant to chapter 74.15 RCW or an equivalent license from  
16 another state; or

17 (ii) An individual who cared for a child who was removed from his  
18 or her parent pursuant to chapter 13.34 RCW and who has a kin  
19 relationship to that child pursuant to RCW 74.13.600.

20 (b) "Parent ally" has the same meaning as provided in RCW  
21 2.70.060.

22 (~~(9) This section expires June 30, 2023.~~)

23 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** This act is necessary for the immediate  
24 preservation of the public peace, health, or safety, or support of  
25 the state government and its existing public institutions, and takes  
26 effect June 30, 2023.

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