
SENATE BILL 5426

State of Washington

68th Legislature

2023 Regular Session

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

Read first time 01/17/23. Referred to Committee on Human Services.

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.

--- END ---