S-0769.1

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**SENATE BILL 5508**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**State of Washington 69th Legislature 2025 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Krishnadasan, Saldaña, Alvarado, Hasegawa, Lovelett, Nobles, Salomon, Trudeau, Valdez, and C. Wilson

AN ACT Relating to the child welfare housing assistance program; amending RCW 74.13.802; and reenacting and amending RCW 13.34.030.

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

**Sec.**  RCW 13.34.030 and 2024 c 328 s 101, 2024 c 298 s 4, and 2024 c 192 s 2 are each reenacted and amended to read as follows:

The definitions in this section apply throughout this chapter unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(1) "Abandoned" means when the child's parent, guardian, or other custodian has expressed, either by statement or conduct, an intent to forego, for an extended period, parental rights or responsibilities despite an ability to exercise such rights and responsibilities. If the court finds that the petitioner has exercised due diligence in attempting to locate the parent, no contact between the child and the child's parent, guardian, or other custodian for a period of three months creates a rebuttable presumption of abandonment, even if there is no expressed intent to abandon.

(2) "Child," "juvenile," and "youth" mean:

(a) Any individual under the age of eighteen years; or

(b) Any individual age 18 to 21 years who is eligible to receive and who elects to receive the extended foster care services authorized under RCW 74.13.031. A youth who remains dependent and who receives extended foster care services under RCW 74.13.031 shall not be considered a "child" under any other statute or for any other purpose.

(3) "Current placement episode" means the period of time that begins with the most recent date that the child was removed from the home of the parent, guardian, or legal custodian for purposes of placement in out-of-home care and continues until: (a) The child returns home; (b) an adoption decree, a permanent custody order, or guardianship order is entered; or (c) the dependency is dismissed, whichever occurs first.

(4) "Department" means the department of children, youth, and families.

(5) "Dependency guardian" means the person, nonprofit corporation, or Indian tribe appointed by the court pursuant to this chapter for the limited purpose of assisting the court in the supervision of the dependency.

(6) "Dependent child" means any child who:

(a) Has been abandoned;

(b) Is abused or neglected as defined in RCW 26.44.020 by a person legally responsible for the care of the child;

(c) Has no parent, guardian, or custodian capable of adequately caring for the child, such that the child is in circumstances which constitute a danger of substantial damage to the child's psychological or physical development;

(d) Is receiving extended foster care services, as authorized by RCW 74.13.031; or

(e) Is a victim of sex trafficking or severe forms of trafficking in persons under the trafficking victims protection act of 2000, 22 U.S.C. Sec. 7101 et seq., when the parent is involved in the trafficking, facilitating the trafficking, or should have known that the child is being trafficked.

(7) "Developmental disability" means a disability attributable to intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, autism, or another neurological or other condition of an individual found by the secretary of the department of social and health services to be closely related to an intellectual disability or to require treatment similar to that required for individuals with intellectual disabilities, which disability originates before the individual attains age eighteen, which has continued or can be expected to continue indefinitely, and which constitutes a substantial limitation to the individual.

(8) "Educational liaison" means a person who has been appointed by the court to fulfill responsibilities outlined in RCW 13.34.046.

(9) "Experiencing homelessness" means lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, including circumstances such as sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, fleeing domestic violence, or a similar reason as described in the federal McKinney-Vento homeless assistance act (Title 42 U.S.C., chapter 119, subchapter I) as it existed on January 1, 2021.

(10) "Extended foster care services" means residential and other support services the department is authorized to provide under RCW 74.13.031. These services may include placement in licensed, relative, or otherwise approved care, or supervised independent living settings; assistance in meeting basic needs; independent living services; supervised independent living subsidy; medical assistance; and counseling or treatment.

(11) "Guardian" means the person or agency that: (a) Has been appointed as the guardian of a child in a legal proceeding, including a guardian appointed pursuant to chapter 13.36 RCW; and (b) has the legal right to custody of the child pursuant to such appointment. The term "guardian" does not include a "dependency guardian" appointed pursuant to a proceeding under this chapter.

(12) "Guardian ad litem" means a person, appointed by the court to represent the best interests of a child in a proceeding under this chapter, or in any matter which may be consolidated with a proceeding under this chapter. A "court-appointed special advocate" appointed by the court to be the guardian ad litem for the child, or to perform substantially the same duties and functions as a guardian ad litem, shall be deemed to be guardian ad litem for all purposes and uses of this chapter.

(13) "Guardian ad litem program" means a court-authorized volunteer program, which is or may be established by the superior court of the county in which such proceeding is filed, to manage all aspects of volunteer guardian ad litem representation for children alleged or found to be dependent. Such management shall include but is not limited to: Recruitment, screening, training, supervision, assignment, and discharge of volunteers.

(14) "Guardianship" means a guardianship pursuant to chapter 13.36 RCW or a limited guardianship of a minor pursuant to RCW 11.130.215 or equivalent laws of another state or a federally recognized Indian tribe.

(15) "High-potency synthetic opioid" means an unprescribed synthetic opioid classified as a Schedule II controlled substance or controlled substance analog in chapter 69.50 RCW or by the pharmacy quality assurance commission in rule including, but not limited to, fentanyl.

(16) "Housing assistance" means appropriate referrals by the department or other agencies to federal, state, local, or private agencies or organizations including the child welfare housing assistance program established under RCW 74.13.802, assistance with forms, applications, or financial subsidies or other monetary assistance for housing. For purposes of this chapter, "housing assistance" is not a remedial service or family reunification service as described in RCW 13.34.025(2).

(17) "Indigent" means a person who, at any stage of a court proceeding, is:

(a) Receiving one of the following types of public assistance: Temporary assistance for needy families, aged, blind, or disabled assistance benefits, medical care services under RCW 74.09.035, pregnant women assistance benefits, poverty-related veterans' benefits, food stamps or food stamp benefits transferred electronically, refugee resettlement benefits, medicaid, or supplemental security income; or

(b) Involuntarily committed to a public mental health facility; or

(c) Receiving an annual income, after taxes, of 125 percent or less of the federally established poverty level; or

(d) Unable to pay the anticipated cost of counsel for the matter before the court because his or her available funds are insufficient to pay any amount for the retention of counsel.

(18) "Nonminor dependent" means any individual age 18 to 21 years who is participating in extended foster care services authorized under RCW 74.13.031.

(19) "Out-of-home care" means placement in a foster family home or group care facility licensed pursuant to chapter 74.15 RCW or placement in a home, other than that of the child's parent, guardian, or legal custodian, not required to be licensed pursuant to chapter 74.15 RCW.

(20) "Parent" means the biological or adoptive parents of a child, or an individual who has established a parent-child relationship under RCW 26.26A.100, unless the legal rights of that person have been terminated by a judicial proceeding pursuant to this chapter, chapter 26.33 RCW, or the equivalent laws of another state or a federally recognized Indian tribe.

(21) "Prevention and family services and programs" means specific mental health prevention and treatment services, substance abuse prevention and treatment services, and in-home parent skill-based programs that qualify for federal funding under the federal family first prevention services act, P.L. 115-123. For purposes of this chapter, prevention and family services and programs are not remedial services or family reunification services as described in RCW 13.34.025(2).

(22) "Prevention services" means preservation services, as defined in chapter 74.14C RCW, and other reasonably available services, including housing assistance, capable of preventing the need for out-of-home placement while protecting the child. Prevention services include, but are not limited to, prevention and family services and programs as defined in this section.

(23) "Qualified residential treatment program" means a program that meets the requirements provided in RCW 13.34.420, qualifies for funding under the family first prevention services act under 42 U.S.C. Sec. 672(k), and, if located within Washington state, is licensed as a group care facility under chapter 74.15 RCW.

(24) "Relative" includes persons related to a child in the following ways:

(a) Any blood relative, including those of half-blood, and including first cousins, second cousins, nephews or nieces, and persons of preceding generations as denoted by prefixes of grand, great, or great-great;

(b) Stepfather, stepmother, stepbrother, and stepsister;

(c) A person who legally adopts a child or the child's parent as well as the natural and other legally adopted children of such persons, and other relatives of the adoptive parents in accordance with state law;

(d) Spouses of any persons named in (a), (b), or (c) of this subsection, even after the marriage is terminated;

(e) Relatives, as named in (a), (b), (c), or (d) of this subsection, of any half sibling of the child; or

(f) Extended family members, as defined by the law or custom of the Indian child's tribe or, in the absence of such law or custom, a person who has reached the age of 18 and who is the Indian child's grandparent, aunt or uncle, brother or sister, brother-in-law or sister-in-law, niece or nephew, first or second cousin, or stepparent who provides care in the family abode on a 24 hour basis to an Indian child as defined in 25 U.S.C. Sec. 1903(4).

(25) "Shelter care" means temporary physical care in a facility licensed pursuant to RCW 74.15.030 or in a home not required to be licensed pursuant to RCW 74.15.030.

(26) "Sibling" means a child's birth brother, birth sister, adoptive brother, adoptive sister, half-brother, or half-sister, or as defined by the law or custom of the Indian child's tribe for an Indian child as defined in RCW 13.38.040.

(27) "Social study" means a written evaluation of matters relevant to the disposition of the case that contains the information required by RCW 13.34.430.

(28) "Supervised independent living setting" includes, but is not limited to, apartment living, room and board arrangements, college or university dormitories, and shared roommate settings. Supervised independent living settings must be approved by the department or the court.

(29) "Supervised independent living subsidy" has the same meaning as in RCW 74.13.020.

(30) "Voluntary placement agreement" has, for the purposes of extended foster care services, the same meaning as in RCW 74.13.336.

**Sec.**  RCW 74.13.802 and 2023 c 321 s 1 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) Within funds appropriated for this specific purpose, the department shall administer a child welfare housing assistance program, which provides housing vouchers, rental assistance, navigation, and other support services to eligible families.

(a) The department shall operate or contract for the operation of the child welfare housing assistance program under subsection (3) of this section in one or more counties west of the crest of the Cascade mountain range and one or more counties east of the crest of the Cascade mountain range.

(b) The child welfare housing assistance program is intended to reduce the need for foster care placement and to shorten the time that children remain in out-of-home care when placement is necessary.

(c) The department or entities contracted with the department under this section may continue to provide housing assistance through the child welfare housing assistance program after the department is no longer providing child welfare or child protective services to the family.

(d) The department shall adopt rules to establish formal procedures for implementation of the child welfare housing assistance program.

(2) The following families are eligible for assistance from the child welfare housing assistance program:

(a) A parent with a child who is dependent pursuant to chapter 13.34 RCW and a lack of appropriate housing is a remaining barrier to reunification; and

(b) A parent of a child who is a candidate for foster care as defined in RCW 26.44.020 and whose housing instability is a barrier to the child remaining in the home.

(3) The department shall 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 child welfare housing assistance program. If no outside entity or entities are available to operate the program or specific parts of the program, the department may operate the program or the specific parts that are not operated by an outside entity.

(4) Families may be referred to the child welfare housing assistance program by a department caseworker, an attorney, a guardian ad litem as defined in chapter 13.34 RCW, a parent ally as defined in RCW 2.70.060, an office of public defense social worker, or the court.

(5) The department shall consult with a stakeholder group that must include, but is not limited to, the following:

(a) Parent allies;

(b) Parent attorneys and social workers managed by the office of public defense parent representation program;

(c) The department of commerce;

(d) Housing experts;

(e) Community-based organizations;

(f) Advocates; and

(g) Behavioral health providers.

(6) The stakeholder group established in subsection (5) of this section shall begin meeting after July 28, 2019, and assist the department in design of the child welfare housing assistance program in areas including, but not limited to:

(a) Equitable racial, geographic, ethnic, and gender distribution of program support;

(b) Eligibility criteria;

(c) Creating a definition of homeless for purposes of eligibility for the program; and

(d) Options for program design that include outside entities operating the entire program or specific parts of the program.

(7) Beginning November 1, 2024, the department shall annually report data and outcomes for the child welfare housing assistance program to the legislature. At a minimum, when available, the report must include the following information:

(a) Distribution of the child welfare housing assistance program by race, geography, ethnicity, and gender including a discussion of whether this distribution was equitable; ((~~and~~))

(b) Any recommendations for legislative changes to the child welfare housing assistance program;

(c) The number of unhoused parents on the waiting list for vouchers supported by the child welfare housing assistance program and the average time spent on the waiting list;

(d) The percentage of funding spent on housing assistance for families to prevent out-of-home placement, support reunification, provide for program administration, or other purposes; and

(e) The percentage of funding spent on program administration, rental assistance to families, and supportive services necessary to receive federal housing voucher support.

(8) The child welfare housing assistance program established in this section is subject to the availability of funds appropriated for this purpose.

(9) During the 2025-2027 biennium, the department shall increase the number of households served by the child welfare housing assistance program by at least 200 above those served during fiscal year 2025, with a priority on serving families on any wait lists. Beginning July 1, 2027, the department shall continue to provide child welfare housing assistance to at least the same number of households as were served during the 2025-2027 biennium.

**--- END ---**