

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5508

As of February 20, 2025

Title: An act relating to the child welfare housing assistance program.

Brief Description: Concerning the child welfare housing assistance program.

Sponsors: Senators Krishnadasan, Saldaña, Alvarado, Hasegawa, Lovelett, Nobles, Salomon, Trudeau, Valdez and Wilson, C..

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services: 2/05/25, 2/12/25 [DPS-WM, DNP, w/oRec].
Ways & Means: 2/20/25.

Brief Summary of First Substitute Bill

- Allows the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF), or entities contracted with DCYF to operate the Child Welfare Housing Assistance Program (Program), to provide housing assistance through the Program after DCYF is no longer providing child welfare or child protective services to the family.
- Directs DCYF to serve families eligible for the Program who are placed on a waiting list of any kind in an attempt to serve all families eligible for the program and eliminate any waiting lists, subject to appropriation.
- Adds additional reporting requirements to DCYF's annual report to the Legislature.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5508 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Wilson, C., Chair; Frame, Vice Chair; Orwall.

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.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senator Christian, Ranking Member.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senator Warnick.

Staff: Alison Mendiola (786-7488)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Staff: Josh Hinman (786-7281)

Background: Child Welfare Housing Assistance Program. The purpose of the Child Welfare Housing Assistance Program (Program) is to reduce the need for foster care placement and to shorten the time children remain in out-of-home care when placement is necessary by provide housing vouchers, rental assistance, navigation, and other support services to eligible families. DCYF administers the Program, in one or more counties in Eastern and Western Washington, within funds appropriated for this specific purpose. The Program was initially created as a pilot program in 2019 and made permanent in 2023.

Eligibility. The following families are eligible for assistance from the Program:

- a parent with a child who is 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 contracts 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, at a minimum, when available, the distribution of the Program by race, geography, ethnicity, and gender including a discussion of whether of this distribution is equitable and include any recommendations for legislative changes to the Program.

Summary of Bill (First Substitute): DYCF, or entities contracted with DCYF to operate the Program, may continue to provide housing assistance through the Program after DCYF is no longer providing child welfare or child protective services to the family. DCYF is to adopt rules to establish formal procedures for implementation of the Program.

Subject to appropriation, DCYF shall serve families eligible for the program who are placed on a waiting list of any kind in an attempt to serve all eligible families and eliminate any waiting list.

DCYF's annual report to the Legislature is to include the following additional information:

- the number of unhoused parents on the waiting list for vouchers supported by the Program and the average time spent on the waiting list;
- 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
- the percentage of funding spent on program administration, rental assistance to families, and supportive services necessary to receive federal housing voucher support.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE (First Substitute):

- Removes the Program from the list of entities that DCYF may refer families to when providing housing assistance.
- Replaces the requirement that DCYF increase the number of households served by the Program by 200 additional families above the number currently served with a requirement that DCYF serve families eligible for the program who are placed on a waiting list of any kind in an attempt to serve all eligible families and eliminate any waiting list, subject to appropriation.

Appropriation: The bill contains a section or sections to limit implementation to the availability of amounts appropriated for that specific purpose.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill (Human Services): *The committee recommended a different version of the bill than what was heard.* PRO: Too often children are unnecessarily separated from their families and their parents not because of neglect or abuse but simply because their families can't afford housing. No child should have to grow up away from their family due to financial hardship alone. This bill will take a critical step toward keeping families together by expanding the child welfare housing assistance program by ensuring families receiving housing support through the program can continue to do so even after the child leaves child welfare or protective services. The impact of this program actually saves money for the state over the long term as well because it's very expensive to keep a child in foster care. It is four times more expensive to have a child in foster care than it is to fund this program. In addition to saving the state money, shortening a child's length of time in foster care prevents prolonged trauma which is the most important thing. At its core, this bill recognizes that housing stability is family stability. There are currently 108 families who are on a wait list for housing and the demand continues to grow.

State investment in this program leverages federal dollars. Research from the Administrative Office of the Courts shows that 30 percent of out-of-home placements arise or last longer because the family does not have an adequate place to live, and 5 percent of young people aging out of foster care become homeless within three months and within 12 months that number rises to 15 percent.

Housing authorities have partnered with DCYF, with the assistance of the Legislature. Housing organizations have committed to 167 apartments and housing vouchers for DCYF's use when in the judgement of its case worker or dependency court that housing would work for one of three purposes: prevent the need for foster care; shorten the need for foster care; or to house a teenager aging out of foster care or coming out of juvenile rehabilitation who would otherwise start their independent adulthood by becoming homeless. In return, DCYF agreed to provide or arrange for support services for those assisted households to help them find housing and succeed as a tenant. It's expensive, but far cheaper than having a child in out-of-home placement or a teenager being homeless.

By making these services more accessible and long term, we can help prevent unnecessary family separations caused by housing insecurity.

The impact of this program actually serves to save money to the state over the long term as well because it is very expensive to keep a child in foster care by bringing them out—shortening their length of time in the foster care program.

Persons Testifying (Human Services): PRO: Senator Deborah Krishnadasan, Prime Sponsor; Michael Mirra, Assoc. of Wash. Housing Authorities; Admin. Office of the Courts Comm. on Housing & Child Welfare; Kim Justice, Partners for Our Children; Shrounda Selivanoff, Washington State Office of Public Defense; Jason Bragg; Jennifer Justice.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Human Services): No one.