

RCW 74.13.802 Child welfare housing assistance program. (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.

(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.

(8) The child welfare housing assistance program established in this section is subject to the availability of funds appropriated for this purpose. [2023 c 321 § 1; 2022 c 297 § 965; 2020 c 33 § 7; 2019 c 328 § 1.]

Effective date—2023 c 321: "This act is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety, or support of the state government and its existing public institutions, and takes effect June 30, 2023." [2023 c 321 § 2.]

Effective date—2022 c 297: See note following RCW 43.79.565.

Intent—2020 c 33: See note following RCW 74.13.715.