

RCW 26.44.031 Records—Maintenance and disclosure—Destruction of screened-out, unfounded, or inconclusive reports—Rules—Proceedings for enforcement.

(1) To protect the privacy in reporting and the maintenance of reports of nonaccidental injury, neglect, death, sexual abuse, and cruelty to children by their parents, and to safeguard against arbitrary, malicious, or erroneous information or actions, the department shall not disclose or maintain information related to reports of child abuse or neglect except as provided in this section or as otherwise required by state and federal law.

(2) The department shall destroy all of its records concerning:

(a) A screened-out report, within three years from the receipt of the report; and

(b) An unfounded or inconclusive report, within six years of completion of the investigation, unless a prior or subsequent founded report has been received regarding the child who is the subject of the report, a sibling or half-sibling of the child, or a parent, guardian, or legal custodian of the child, before the records are destroyed.

(3) The department may keep records concerning founded reports of child abuse or neglect as the department determines by rule.

(4) No unfounded, screened-out, or inconclusive report or information about a family's participation or nonparticipation in the family assessment response may be disclosed to a child-placing agency, private adoption agency, or any other provider licensed under chapter 74.15 RCW without the consent of the individual who is the subject of the report or family assessment, unless:

(a) The individual seeks to become a licensed foster parent or adoptive parent; or

(b) The individual is the parent or legal custodian of a child being served by one of the agencies referenced in this subsection.

(5) (a) If the department fails to comply with this section, an individual who is the subject of a report may institute proceedings for injunctive or other appropriate relief for enforcement of the requirement to purge information. These proceedings may be instituted in the superior court for the county in which the person resides or, if the person is not then a resident of this state, in the superior court for Thurston county.

(b) If the department fails to comply with subsection (4) of this section and an individual who is the subject of the report or family assessment response information is harmed by the disclosure of information, in addition to the relief provided in (a) of this subsection, the court may award a penalty of up to one thousand dollars and reasonable attorneys' fees and court costs to the petitioner.

(c) A proceeding under this subsection does not preclude other methods of enforcement provided for by law.

(6) Nothing in this section shall prevent the department from retaining general, nonidentifying information which is required for state and federal reporting and management purposes. [2012 c 259 s 4; 2007 c 220 s 3; 1997 c 282 s 1.]

Effective date—2012 c 259 ss 1 and 3-10: See note following RCW 26.44.020.

Effective date—Implementation—2007 c 220 ss 1-3: See notes following RCW 26.44.020.