

---

**Early Learning & Children's  
Services Committee**

---

**HB 1335**

**Brief Description:** Creating a pilot program to utilize a team approach to child welfare cases.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Hinkle, Walsh and Linville.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Creates a pilot program to utilize a team approach to child welfare casework.

**Hearing Date:** 2/9/07

**Staff:** Sonja Hallum (786-7092).

**Background:**

Dependency and Termination of Parental Rights Background

If there are allegations of abandonment, abuse or neglect, or no parent who is capable of caring for a child, the state may investigate the allegations and initiate a dependency proceeding in juvenile court. If the court finds the statutory requirements have been met, the court will find the child to be a dependent of the state.

Whenever the court orders a dependent child to be removed from the home, the court will enter a dispositional plan which will include the obligations of the parties including the parents, the supervising agency or Department of Social and Health Services (Department), and the child. The dispositional order will contain an order for the placement of the child either within the home or outside of the home. If the child is placed outside the home, he or she may be placed with a relative or in non-relative foster care.

Within 60 days of assuming responsibility for the child, the Department is required to provide the court with a permanency plan for the child. The permanency plan will contain the desired goal for the child which may include a plan to return the child home, adoption, long-term placement, or guardianship, including a dependency guardianship. The court must hold the permanency

---

*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

planning hearing when a child has been in out-of-home care for nine months. The hearing must take place within 12 months of the current placement.

The status of all dependent children must be reviewed by the court every six months. During the review the court will examine the progress of the parents in meeting the requirements of the dispositional plan. At this hearing the court may return the child to the home if the parent has made sufficient progress.

If the parent fails to make progress in curing the parental deficiencies which led to the dependency, or if one of the statutory aggravating factors exist, a termination petition may be filed. Federal law requires that after a child has been in foster care for fifteen of the past twenty-two months, the state must file a petition to terminate parental rights unless the child is being cared for by relatives, there is a compelling reason why termination would not be in the best interest of the child, or the state has failed to offer the necessary services to the parent.

If the court finds the statutory grounds for termination are met, the court will terminate the parental rights and the parent will no longer have rights, privileges, or obligations toward the child.

### Casework

The Department has caseworkers assigned to specific areas of the case as it moves through the dependency process. Child Protective Services (CPS) workers investigate referrals to assess the safety and protection needs of children and, when necessary, intervene by providing services designed to increase safety and protect children from further harm. The CPS worker has traditionally been involved in the case through the earlier phases of the case, including initial court hearings; however, the Department is moving towards having the case assigned to a child welfare worker who will handle the case once it moves into court.

The Child Welfare Services (CWS) worker provides both permanency planning and intensive treatment services to children and families who may need assistance. Child Welfare Services are provided to children and families when long-term services are needed beyond those available through Child Protective Services (CPS).

Caseworkers are assigned to work a case individually and receive guidance from a supervisor.

### Task Force Background

In 2005, the legislature formed a task force to review issues pertaining to the health, safety and welfare of children receiving services from Child Protective Services and Child Welfare Services. In 2006, the task force reported several recommendations to the Legislature for improving Child Protective Services and Child Welfare Services.

### **Summary of Bill:**

A pilot program is to be established by the Department to develop a team approach to casework in child welfare cases by December 1, 2007. The pilot program will extend through December 31, 2010 to the extent that funding is appropriated in the operating budget.

The program will consist of two pilot sites, with at least one site located in eastern Washington. The program will assign caseworkers in teams of two to child welfare cases. The caseworkers are

jointly responsible for the cases and are required to make decisions as a team. The caseworkers are permitted to divide the case work and have one caseworker focus on the child while the other focuses on the parent(s). The caseworker to supervisor ration cannot exceed twelve caseworkers to one supervisor.

The Department is required to measure performance and outcomes including changes in reunifications, child abuse or neglect re-referrals, continuances or delays in the court case, progress in dependency cases, caseworker satisfaction, retention, and safety. The Department is required to report its preliminary findings to the Legislature by December 2009 and submit a final report by December 2010.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 17, 2007.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.