

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 2252

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Early Learning & Children's Services

**Title:** An act relating to permanency and postadoption services.

**Brief Description:** Establishing a permanency and postadoption services pilot program.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Pettigrew, Haler, Walsh, Hinkle, Dickerson, Roberts, Kenney and Ormsby.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Early Learning & Children's Services: 2/22/07, 2/23/07 [DP].

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Directs the Department of Social and Health Services to establish a pilot program for community-based post-adoption services.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Haler, Ranking Minority Member; Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Appleton, Hinkle, Pettigrew and Roberts.

**Staff:** Sydney Forrester (786-7120).

**Background:**

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) reports that in 2003, 1,204 adoptions of children from the state's foster care system were completed, with many children still awaiting adoptive homes. Approximately 2,000 children in Washington currently are eligible for adoption out of foster care. These children are legally free and eligible for adoption because the parental rights of their parents have been terminated by a court of law.

Children adopted out of the foster care system frequently have special needs as a result of having been abused and/or neglected. These children may have medical, mental, or physical health needs, developmental delays, and/or developmental disabilities. Families adopting

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children with special needs from the foster care system usually qualify for a monthly cash payment, or an adoption subsidy, to help pay some of the expenses of raising a child with special needs. Adoptive families also may receive some limited training related to the child's needs prior to placement. Other than the adoption subsidy and limited training, however, there is no statewide program of coordinated permanency and post-adoption support for children with special needs and their adoptive families.

Adoption disruption occurs after a child has been placed with an adoptive family but before the adoption has been finalized. The disruption means the child is returned to foster care either permanently or until the child is returned to the adoptive home or is placed in another adoptive home. Adoption dissolution or termination occurs when a child is returned to foster care after the adoption has been finalized. Various studies of nationwide trends indicate that adoption disruption rates range between 8 percent and 16 percent. Research on adoption dissolutions indicates between 1 percent and 7 percent of adoptions are terminated after being finalized.

Risk factors associated with adoption disruption include: age of child; severity of abuse or neglect; disabilities and behavior problems; ethnicity, family structure, and socio-demographics; and family and child characteristics.

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### **Summary of Bill:**

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) is directed to contract with community-based organizations in two or more pilot sites for delivery of post-adoption services to children who have been adopted out of foster care and their adoptive families. The pilots must be designed to gather data regarding the effectiveness of the coordination and delivery of services in reducing adoption disruptions and terminations and in increasing the number of potential adoptive families.

Contracted providers at the pilot sites must coordinate interventions and support designed to prevent disruption of adoptive placements, improve parent-child relationships, and strengthen family functioning. Services to be coordinated at the pilot sites include intensive services such as child assessments; case management; parent-to-parent mentoring; planned respite; and crisis management; as well as less intensive services such as parent education, information, and referral.

By January 2008, the DSHS must provide the Legislature a progress report on implementation of the pilot sites. Beginning in January 2009 and through January 2011, the DSHS will brief the Legislature on the operation of the pilot program, including the data regarding the effectiveness of the coordination and delivery of services in reducing adoption disruptions and terminations and increasing the number of potential adoptive families. The pilot program expires in January 2012.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on February 21, 2007.

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

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) This bill is meant to look at creating support for children adopted out of foster care and their adoptive families. The kids who are at the highest risk for adoption disruption are those who are older when adopted or who have had significant trauma. Well-coordinated and intensive services can make all the difference in keeping the adoptive family in tact.

There is no way the state can predict the long-term impacts of trauma on children. This bill is designed to give former foster youth and their adoptive families access to services that can keep the family together. We know that we are seeing latent onset of behaviors that result from trauma experienced early in life. What we know about adoptions that disrupt permanently is that over time there were several key points when access to coordinated services could have helped preserve the adoption.

Several aspects of child welfare are impacted by this bill. The need for services is increasing among children adopted from the foster care system. This corresponds with the increasing efforts to get more foster children adopted, and the increase in kinship adoptions, and the numbers of adoptions of special needs children. A wider array of children are being adopted, both in terms of their age at adoption and the needs they have. This bill would create a venue for increasing access to much-needed services for adoptive families as well as helping us learn what works best for permanency. The requirement for data and evaluation will help inform whether and how such a program should be expanded to better promote permanency. We would like to see the data gathering focus less on increasing the number of adoptive parents as we feel this would be hard to effectively measure. The program should be focused on preventing adoption dissolutions.

(Opposed) Adoption support dollars are intended to assist families in seeking out their own services. Family reconciliation services also can be used to assist adoptive families.

**Persons Testifying:** (In support) Representative Pettigrew, prime sponsor; Jennifer Dunlap, Children's Home Society of Washington; Daryl Dawgs, Washington Federation of State Employees; and Patrick Weber, Northwest Adoption Exchange.

(Opposed) Cheryl Stephani, Children's Administration, Department of Social and Health Services.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.