

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 1594

As Passed House:
March 6, 2013

Title: An act relating to interviewing children in child protective services investigations.

Brief Description: Concerning interviewing children in child protective services investigations at children's advocacy centers.

Sponsors: House Committee on Early Learning & Human Services (originally sponsored by Representatives Sawyer, Roberts, Zeiger, Walsh, Kagi, Fey, Ryu, Freeman, Appleton, Moscoso and Ormsby).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Early Learning & Human Services: 2/8/13, 2/12/13 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/6/13, 97-0.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Establishes a preference for child protective services' interviews to take place at Children's Advocacy Centers, when access to Children's Advocacy Centers is reasonably available.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & HUMAN SERVICES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Freeman, Vice Chair; Scott, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Farrell, Goodman, MacEwen, Overstreet, Roberts, Sawyer and Zeiger.

Staff: Lindsay Lanham (786-7120).

Background:

Child protective services' investigators are required to respond to allegations of child abuse or child neglect. In statute, each county has the responsibility to develop specific protocol

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.

for handling sexual abuse, child fatality, child physical abuse, and criminal child neglect cases. The regional protocol must address the coordination between the prosecutor's office, law enforcement, children's protective services, Child Advocacy Centers (when available), local advocacy groups, community sexual assault programs, emergency medical services, or any other agency involved in the investigation of the case.

Children's Advocacy Center is defined in statute as a child-focused facility in good standing with the state chapter for Children's Advocacy Centers. Children's Advocacy Centers coordinate a multidisciplinary process for the investigation, prosecution, and treatment of sexual and other types of child abuse. Children's Advocacy Centers provide a location for forensic interviews and coordinate access to services such as, but not limited to, medical evaluations, advocacy, therapy, and case review by multidisciplinary teams within the context of county protocols.

Traditionally, forensic interviews are conducted when there is a possibility that a criminal case may emerge from the child protective services' investigation. Forensic interviews are often conducted in a standardized manner and used to obtain facts. Forensic interviews serve as the child's recorded statement. Currently, not all child protective services' investigations require forensic interviewing.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Children's Advocacy Centers are established as the preferred location for all child protective services' interviews, when access to Children's Advocacy Centers is reasonably available.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: This bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed, except for section 2 relating to the general preference for forensic interviews to occur at Child Advocacy Centers, which takes effect December 1, 2013.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Children's Advocacy Centers create a child-friendly one-stop-shop for children and families, where cases can be reviewed by medical staff, law enforcement, prosecutors, advocates and child welfare staff. When children are dealing with a traumatic event, children need to feel comfortable, have the opportunity to speak freely, and feel that they are in a safe place. In one Children's Advocacy Center in the state, for example, service animals are used to help ease the stress of what may be a very stressful situation for children. Additionally, if videos or observations are required, both can occur at Children's Advocacy Centers. Children's Advocacy Centers are beneficial for the field as they increase prosecutions and can be a tool for law enforcement and for the children who are victims of abuse.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Sawyer, prime sponsor; and Seth Dawson, Child Advocacy Centers of Washington.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.