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**HOUSE BILL 2761**

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**State of Washington 65th Legislature 2018 Regular Session**

**By** Representatives Kagi, Griffey, Dent, Orwall, Senn, Eslick, Kilduff, Graves, Stonier, Jinkins, Tharinger, and Reeves

AN ACT Relating to improving placement stability for children and youth involved with child welfare services; amending RCW 13.34.040, 13.34.065, 26.44.272, 74.13.065, and 13.34.260; reenacting and amending RCW 13.34.145; adding new sections to chapter 13.34 RCW; and creating a new section.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The legislature finds that stable, nurturing environments and connection to family are both critical to the well-being of children in out-of-home care. The legislature finds that early identification of a child's relatives allows the placement of children with family and increases placement stability. The legislature also finds that, when a child is in nonrelative care for an extended period and a relative is identified, the court must consider both the value of the child's bonding and attachment to long-term caregivers and the value of family attachment when determining permanency. The legislature affirms that the provisions of the state Indian child welfare act, chapter 13.38 RCW, and the federal Indian child welfare act, 25 U.S.C. Sec. 1901 et seq., shall prevail for any Indian child when there is a conflict with any state child welfare provision.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 13.34 RCW to read as follows:

Chapter 13.38 RCW and 25 U.S.C. Sec. 1901 et seq. shall apply in all child custody proceedings as defined in these acts. Whenever there is a conflict between chapter 13.32A, 13.34, 13.36, 26.10, or 26.33 RCW, the provisions of chapter 13.38 RCW and 25 U.S.C. Sec. 1901 et seq. shall apply.

**Sec.**  RCW 13.34.040 and 2011 c 309 s 23 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) Any person may file with the clerk of the superior court a petition showing that there is within the county, or residing within the county, a dependent child and requesting that the superior court deal with such child as provided in this chapter. There shall be no fee for filing such petitions.

(2) In counties having paid probation officers, these officers shall, to the extent possible, first determine if a petition is reasonably justifiable. Each petition shall be verified and contain a statement of facts constituting a dependency, and the names and residence, if known to the petitioner, of the parents, guardian, or custodian of the alleged dependent child. Each petition shall also contain a description of the department's efforts to identify relatives and other suitable persons who can provide support for the family and potential placement of the child.

(3) Every petition filed in proceedings under this chapter shall contain a statement alleging whether the child is or may be an Indian child as defined in RCW 13.38.040. If the child is an Indian child chapter 13.38 RCW shall apply.

(4) Every order or decree entered under this chapter shall contain a finding that the federal Indian child welfare act or chapter 13.38 RCW does or does not apply. Where there is a finding that the federal Indian child welfare act or chapter 13.38 RCW does apply, the decree or order must also contain a finding that all notice requirements and evidentiary requirements under the federal Indian child welfare act and chapter 13.38 RCW have been satisfied.

**Sec.**  RCW 13.34.065 and 2013 c 162 s 6 are each amended to read as follows:

(1)(a) When a child is taken into custody, the court shall hold a shelter care hearing within seventy-two hours, excluding Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays. The primary purpose of the shelter care hearing is to determine whether the child can be immediately and safely returned home while the adjudication of the dependency is pending.

(b) Any parent, guardian, or legal custodian who for good cause is unable to attend the shelter care hearing may request that a subsequent shelter care hearing be scheduled. The request shall be made to the clerk of the court where the petition is filed prior to the initial shelter care hearing. Upon the request of the parent, the court shall schedule the hearing within seventy-two hours of the request, excluding Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays. The clerk shall notify all other parties of the hearing by any reasonable means.

(2)(a) If it is likely that the child will remain in shelter care longer than seventy-two hours, in those areas in which child welfare services are being provided by a supervising agency, the supervising agency shall assume case management responsibilities of the case. The department or supervising agency shall submit a recommendation to the court as to the further need for shelter care in all cases in which the child will remain in shelter care longer than the seventy-two hour period. In all other cases, the recommendation shall be submitted by the juvenile court probation counselor.

(b) All parties have the right to present testimony to the court regarding the need or lack of need for shelter care.

(c) Hearsay evidence before the court regarding the need or lack of need for shelter care must be supported by sworn testimony, affidavit, or declaration of the person offering such evidence.

(3)(a) At the commencement of the hearing, the court shall notify the parent, guardian, or custodian of the following:

(i) The parent, guardian, or custodian has the right to a shelter care hearing;

(ii) The nature of the shelter care hearing, the rights of the parents, and the proceedings that will follow; and

(iii) If the parent, guardian, or custodian is not represented by counsel, the right to be represented. If the parent, guardian, or custodian is indigent, the court shall appoint counsel as provided in RCW 13.34.090; and

(b) If a parent, guardian, or legal custodian desires to waive the shelter care hearing, the court shall determine, on the record and with the parties present, whether such waiver is knowing and voluntary. A parent may not waive his or her right to the shelter care hearing unless he or she appears in court and the court determines that the waiver is knowing and voluntary. Regardless of whether the court accepts the parental waiver of the shelter care hearing, the court must provide notice to the parents of their rights required under (a) of this subsection and make the finding required under subsection (4) of this section.

(4) At the shelter care hearing the court shall examine the need for shelter care and inquire into the status of the case. The paramount consideration for the court shall be the health, welfare, and safety of the child. At a minimum, the court shall inquire into the following:

(a) Whether the notice required under RCW 13.34.062 was given to all known parents, guardians, or legal custodians of the child. The court shall make an express finding as to whether the notice required under RCW 13.34.062 was given to the parent, guardian, or legal custodian. If actual notice was not given to the parent, guardian, or legal custodian and the whereabouts of such person is known or can be ascertained, the court shall order the department to make reasonable efforts to advise the parent, guardian, or legal custodian of the status of the case, including the date and time of any subsequent hearings, and their rights under RCW 13.34.090;

(b) Whether the child can be safely returned home while the adjudication of the dependency is pending;

(c) What efforts have been made to place the child with a relative. The court shall ask the parents whether the department discussed with them the placement of the child with a relative or other suitable person described in RCW 13.34.130(1)(b) and shall determine what efforts have been made toward such a placement;

(d) What services were provided to the family to prevent or eliminate the need for removal of the child from the child's home. If the dependency petition or other information before the court alleges that homelessness or the lack of suitable housing was a significant factor contributing to the removal of the child, the court shall inquire as to whether housing assistance was provided to the family to prevent or eliminate the need for removal of the child or children;

(e) Is the placement proposed by the department or supervising agency the least disruptive and most family-like setting that meets the needs of the child;

(f) Whether it is in the best interest of the child to remain enrolled in the school, developmental program, or child care the child was in prior to placement and what efforts have been made to maintain the child in the school, program, or child care if it would be in the best interest of the child to remain in the same school, program, or child care;

(g) Appointment of a guardian ad litem or attorney;

(h) Whether the child is or may be an Indian child as defined in RCW 13.38.040, whether the provisions of the federal Indian child welfare act or chapter 13.38 RCW apply, and whether there is compliance with the federal Indian child welfare act and chapter 13.38 RCW, including notice to the child's tribe;

(i) Whether, as provided in RCW 26.44.063, restraining orders, or orders expelling an allegedly abusive household member from the home of a nonabusive parent, guardian, or legal custodian, will allow the child to safely remain in the home;

(j) Whether any orders for examinations, evaluations, or immediate services are needed. The court may not order a parent to undergo examinations, evaluation, or services at the shelter care hearing unless the parent agrees to the examination, evaluation, or service;

(k) The terms and conditions for parental, sibling, and family visitation.

(5)(a) The court shall release a child alleged to be dependent to the care, custody, and control of the child's parent, guardian, or legal custodian unless the court finds there is reasonable cause to believe that:

(i) After consideration of the specific services that have been provided, reasonable efforts have been made to prevent or eliminate the need for removal of the child from the child's home and to make it possible for the child to return home; and

(ii)(A) The child has no parent, guardian, or legal custodian to provide supervision and care for such child; or

(B) The release of such child would present a serious threat of substantial harm to such child, notwithstanding an order entered pursuant to RCW 26.44.063; or

(C) The parent, guardian, or custodian to whom the child could be released has been charged with violating RCW 9A.40.060 or 9A.40.070.

(b) If the court does not release the child to his or her parent, guardian, or legal custodian, the court shall order placement with a relative or other suitable person as described in RCW 13.34.130(1)(b), unless there is reasonable cause to believe the health, safety, or welfare of the child would be jeopardized or that the efforts to reunite the parent and child will be hindered. If such relative or other suitable person appears otherwise suitable and competent to provide care and treatment, the fingerprint-based background check need not be completed before placement, but as soon as possible after placement. The court must also determine whether placement with the relative or other suitable person is in the child's best interests. The relative or other suitable person must be willing and available to:

(i) Care for the child and be able to meet any special needs of the child;

(ii) Facilitate the child's visitation with siblings, if such visitation is part of the supervising agency's plan or is ordered by the court; and

(iii) Cooperate with the department or supervising agency in providing necessary background checks and home studies.

(c) If the child was not initially placed with a relative or other suitable person, and the court does not release the child to his or her parent, guardian, or legal custodian, the supervising agency shall make reasonable efforts to locate a relative or other suitable person pursuant to RCW 13.34.060(1). ((~~In determining placement, the court shall weigh the child's length of stay and attachment to the current provider in determining what is in the best interest of the child.~~))

(d) If a relative or other suitable person is not available, the court shall order continued shelter care and shall set forth its reasons for the order. If the court orders placement of the child with a person not related to the child and not licensed to provide foster care, the placement is subject to all terms and conditions of this section that apply to relative placements.

(e) Any placement with a relative, or other suitable person approved by the court pursuant to this section, shall be contingent upon cooperation with the department's or supervising agency's case plan and compliance with court orders related to the care and supervision of the child including, but not limited to, court orders regarding parent-child contacts, sibling contacts, and any other conditions imposed by the court. Noncompliance with the case plan or court order is grounds for removal of the child from the home of the relative or other suitable person, subject to review by the court.

(f) Uncertainty by a parent, guardian, legal custodian, relative, or other suitable person that the alleged abuser has in fact abused the child shall not, alone, be the basis upon which a child is removed from the care of a parent, guardian, or legal custodian under (a) of this subsection, nor shall it be a basis, alone, to preclude placement with a relative or other suitable person under (b) of this subsection.

(6)(a) A shelter care order issued pursuant to this section shall include the requirement for a case conference as provided in RCW 13.34.067. However, if the parent is not present at the shelter care hearing, or does not agree to the case conference, the court shall not include the requirement for the case conference in the shelter care order.

(b) If the court orders a case conference, the shelter care order shall include notice to all parties and establish the date, time, and location of the case conference which shall be no later than thirty days before the fact-finding hearing.

(c) The court may order another conference, case staffing, or hearing as an alternative to the case conference required under RCW 13.34.067 so long as the conference, case staffing, or hearing ordered by the court meets all requirements under RCW 13.34.067, including the requirement of a written agreement specifying the services to be provided to the parent.

(7)(a)(i) A shelter care order issued pursuant to this section may be amended at any time with notice and hearing thereon. The shelter care decision of placement shall be modified only upon a showing of change in circumstances. No child may be placed in shelter care for longer than thirty days without an order, signed by the judge, authorizing continued shelter care.

(ii) If the department requests an order authorizing continued shelter care pursuant to this subsection, the department must prior to or at that time submit a written report to all parties and the court that includes:

(A) The specific efforts taken by the department to identify relatives and if authorized other suitable persons for potential placement of the child or support for the family; and

(B) The efforts taken by the department to support natural connections to the family.

(iii) The court shall not condition authorization of continued shelter care upon the written report or efforts taken by the department.

(b)(i) An order releasing the child on any conditions specified in this section may at any time be amended, with notice and hearing thereon, so as to return the child to shelter care for failure of the parties to conform to the conditions originally imposed.

(ii) The court shall consider whether nonconformance with any conditions resulted from circumstances beyond the control of the parent, guardian, or legal custodian and give weight to that fact before ordering return of the child to shelter care.

(8)(a) If a child is returned home from shelter care a second time in the case, or if the supervisor of the caseworker deems it necessary, the multidisciplinary team may be reconvened.

(b) If a child is returned home from shelter care a second time in the case a law enforcement officer must be present and file a report to the department.

**Sec.**  RCW 13.34.145 and 2015 c 270 s 2 and 2015 c 257 s 1 are each reenacted and amended to read as follows:

(1) The purpose of a permanency planning hearing is to review the permanency plan for the child, inquire into the welfare of the child and progress of the case, and reach decisions regarding the permanent placement of the child.

(a) A permanency planning hearing shall be held in all cases where the child has remained in out-of-home care for at least nine months and an adoption decree, guardianship order, or permanent custody order has not previously been entered. The hearing shall take place no later than twelve months following commencement of the current placement episode.

(b) Whenever a child is removed from the home of a dependency guardian or long-term relative or foster care provider, and the child is not returned to the home of the parent, guardian, or legal custodian but is placed in out-of-home care, a permanency planning hearing shall take place no later than twelve months, as provided in this section, following the date of removal unless, prior to the hearing, the child returns to the home of the dependency guardian or long-term care provider, the child is placed in the home of the parent, guardian, or legal custodian, an adoption decree, guardianship order, or a permanent custody order is entered, or the dependency is dismissed. Every effort shall be made to provide stability in long-term placement, and to avoid disruption of placement, unless the child is being returned home or it is in the best interest of the child. When determining a child's out-of-home placement, the court shall give weight to the child's stability of placement, length of stay, and attachment to the current long-term care provider in determining what is in the best interest of the child.

(c) Permanency planning goals should be achieved at the earliest possible date, preferably before the child has been in out-of-home care for fifteen months. In cases where parental rights have been terminated, the child is legally free for adoption, and adoption has been identified as the primary permanency planning goal, it shall be a goal to complete the adoption within six months following entry of the termination order.

(2) No later than ten working days prior to the permanency planning hearing, the agency having custody of the child shall submit a written permanency plan to the court and shall mail a copy of the plan to all parties and their legal counsel, if any.

(3) When the youth is at least age seventeen years but not older than seventeen years and six months, the department shall provide the youth with written documentation which explains the availability of extended foster care services and detailed instructions regarding how the youth may access such services after he or she reaches age eighteen years.

(4) At the permanency planning hearing, the court shall conduct the following inquiry:

(a) If a goal of long-term foster or relative care has been achieved prior to the permanency planning hearing, the court shall review the child's status to determine whether the placement and the plan for the child's care remain appropriate. The court shall find, as of the date of the hearing, that the child's placement and plan of care is the best permanency plan for the child and provide compelling reasons why it continues to not be in the child's best interest to (i) return home; (ii) be placed for adoption; (iii) be placed with a legal guardian; or (iv) be placed with a fit and willing relative. If the child is present at the hearing, the court should ask the child about his or her desired permanency outcome.

(b) In cases where the primary permanency planning goal has not been achieved, the court shall inquire regarding the reasons why the primary goal has not been achieved and determine what needs to be done to make it possible to achieve the primary goal. The court shall review the permanency plan prepared by the agency and make explicit findings regarding each of the following:

(i) The continuing necessity for, and the safety and appropriateness of, the placement;

(ii) The extent of compliance with the permanency plan by the department or supervising agency and any other service providers, the child's parents, the child, and the child's guardian, if any;

(iii) The extent of any efforts to involve appropriate service providers in addition to department or supervising agency staff in planning to meet the special needs of the child and the child's parents;

(iv) The progress toward eliminating the causes for the child's placement outside of his or her home and toward returning the child safely to his or her home or obtaining a permanent placement for the child;

(v) The date by which it is likely that the child will be returned to his or her home or placed for adoption, with a guardian or in some other alternative permanent placement; ((~~and~~))

(vi) If the child has been placed outside of his or her home for fifteen of the most recent twenty-two months, not including any period during which the child was a runaway from the out-of-home placement or the first six months of any period during which the child was returned to his or her home for a trial home visit, the appropriateness of the permanency plan, whether reasonable efforts were made by the department or supervising agency to achieve the goal of the permanency plan, and the circumstances which prevent the child from any of the following:

(A) Being returned safely to his or her home;

(B) Having a petition for the involuntary termination of parental rights filed on behalf of the child;

(C) Being placed for adoption;

(D) Being placed with a guardian;

(E) Being placed in the home of a fit and willing relative of the child; or

(F) Being placed in some other alternative permanent placement, including independent living or long-term foster care; and

(vii) If the child is not placed with a relative or other suitable person, determine what efforts the department has made to identify relatives and other suitable persons for potential placement.

(5) Following this inquiry, at the permanency planning hearing, the court shall order the department or supervising agency to file a petition seeking termination of parental rights if the child has been in out-of-home care for fifteen of the last twenty-two months since the date the dependency petition was filed unless the court makes a good cause exception as to why the filing of a termination of parental rights petition is not appropriate. Any good cause finding shall be reviewed at all subsequent hearings pertaining to the child.

(a) For purposes of this subsection, "good cause exception" includes but is not limited to the following:

(i) The child is being cared for by a relative;

(ii) The department has not provided to the child's family such services as the court and the department have deemed necessary for the child's safe return home;

(iii) The department has documented in the case plan a compelling reason for determining that filing a petition to terminate parental rights would not be in the child's best interests;

(iv) The parent is incarcerated, or the parent's prior incarceration is a significant factor in why the child has been in foster care for fifteen of the last twenty-two months, the parent maintains a meaningful role in the child's life, and the department has not documented another reason why it would be otherwise appropriate to file a petition pursuant to this section;

(v) Where a parent has been accepted into a dependency treatment court program or long-term substance abuse or dual diagnoses treatment program and is demonstrating compliance with treatment goals; or

(vi) Where a parent who has been court ordered to complete services necessary for the child's safe return home files a declaration under penalty of perjury stating the parent's financial inability to pay for the same court-ordered services, and also declares the department was unwilling or unable to pay for the same services necessary for the child's safe return home.

(b) The court's assessment of whether a parent who is incarcerated maintains a meaningful role in the child's life may include consideration of the following:

(i) The parent's expressions or acts of manifesting concern for the child, such as letters, telephone calls, visits, and other forms of communication with the child;

(ii) The parent's efforts to communicate and work with the department or supervising agency or other individuals for the purpose of complying with the service plan and repairing, maintaining, or building the parent‑child relationship;

(iii) A positive response by the parent to the reasonable efforts of the department or the supervising agency;

(iv) Information provided by individuals or agencies in a reasonable position to assist the court in making this assessment, including but not limited to the parent's attorney, correctional and mental health personnel, or other individuals providing services to the parent;

(v) Limitations in the parent's access to family support programs, therapeutic services, and visiting opportunities, restrictions to telephone and mail services, inability to participate in foster care planning meetings, and difficulty accessing lawyers and participating meaningfully in court proceedings; and

(vi) Whether the continued involvement of the parent in the child's life is in the child's best interest.

(c) The constraints of a parent's current or prior incarceration and associated delays or barriers to accessing court‑mandated services may be considered in rebuttal to a claim of aggravated circumstances under RCW 13.34.132(4)(h) for a parent's failure to complete available treatment.

(6)(a) If the permanency plan identifies independent living as a goal, the court at the permanency planning hearing shall make a finding that the provision of services to assist the child in making a transition from foster care to independent living will allow the child to manage his or her financial, personal, social, educational, and nonfinancial affairs prior to approving independent living as a permanency plan of care. The court will inquire whether the child has been provided information about extended foster care services.

(b) The permanency plan shall also specifically identify the services, including extended foster care services, where appropriate, that will be provided to assist the child to make a successful transition from foster care to independent living.

(c) The department or supervising agency shall not discharge a child to an independent living situation before the child is eighteen years of age unless the child becomes emancipated pursuant to chapter 13.64 RCW.

(7) If the child has resided in the home of a foster parent or relative for more than six months prior to the permanency planning hearing, the court shall:

(a) Enter a finding regarding whether the foster parent or relative was informed of the hearing as required in RCW 74.13.280, 13.34.215(6), and 13.34.096; and

(b) If the department or supervising agency is recommending a placement other than the child's current placement with a foster parent, relative, or other suitable person, enter a finding as to the reasons for the recommendation for a change in placement.

(8) In all cases, at the permanency planning hearing, the court shall:

(a)(i) Order the permanency plan prepared by the supervising agency to be implemented; or

(ii) Modify the permanency plan, and order implementation of the modified plan; and

(b)(i) Order the child returned home only if the court finds that a reason for removal as set forth in RCW 13.34.130 no longer exists; or

(ii) Order the child to remain in out-of-home care for a limited specified time period while efforts are made to implement the permanency plan.

(9) Following the first permanency planning hearing, the court shall hold a further permanency planning hearing in accordance with this section at least once every twelve months until a permanency planning goal is achieved or the dependency is dismissed, whichever occurs first.

(10) Prior to the second permanency planning hearing, the agency that has custody of the child shall consider whether to file a petition for termination of parental rights.

(11) If the court orders the child returned home, casework supervision by the department or supervising agency shall continue for at least six months, at which time a review hearing shall be held pursuant to RCW 13.34.138, and the court shall determine the need for continued intervention.

(12) The juvenile court may hear a petition for permanent legal custody when: (a) The court has ordered implementation of a permanency plan that includes permanent legal custody; and (b) the party pursuing the permanent legal custody is the party identified in the permanency plan as the prospective legal custodian. During the pendency of such proceeding, the court shall conduct review hearings and further permanency planning hearings as provided in this chapter. At the conclusion of the legal guardianship or permanent legal custody proceeding, a juvenile court hearing shall be held for the purpose of determining whether dependency should be dismissed. If a guardianship or permanent custody order has been entered, the dependency shall be dismissed.

(13) Continued juvenile court jurisdiction under this chapter shall not be a barrier to the entry of an order establishing a legal guardianship or permanent legal custody when the requirements of subsection (12) of this section are met.

(14) Nothing in this chapter may be construed to limit the ability of the agency that has custody of the child to file a petition for termination of parental rights or a guardianship petition at any time following the establishment of dependency. Upon the filing of such a petition, a fact-finding hearing shall be scheduled and held in accordance with this chapter unless the department or supervising agency requests dismissal of the petition prior to the hearing or unless the parties enter an agreed order terminating parental rights, establishing guardianship, or otherwise resolving the matter.

(15) The approval of a permanency plan that does not contemplate return of the child to the parent does not relieve the supervising agency of its obligation to provide reasonable services, under this chapter, intended to effectuate the return of the child to the parent, including but not limited to, visitation rights. The court shall consider the child's relationships with siblings in accordance with RCW 13.34.130.

(16) Nothing in this chapter may be construed to limit the procedural due process rights of any party in a termination or guardianship proceeding filed under this chapter.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 13.34 RCW to read as follows:

After a child has remained in out-of-home care for one year since the filing of a dependency petition, in determining placement, the court shall weigh the benefits of relative placement with the stability provided by and attachment to a long-term caregiver.

**Sec.**  RCW 26.44.272 and 2014 c 160 s 1 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The family assessment response worker must assess for child safety and child well-being when collaborating with a family to determine the need for child care, preschool, or home visiting services and, as appropriate, the family assessment response worker must refer children to preschool programs that are enrolled in the early achievers program and rate at a level 3, 4, or 5 unless:

(a) The family lives in an area with no local preschool programs that rate at a level 3, 4, or 5 in the early achievers program;

(b) The local preschool programs that rate at a level 3, 4, or 5 in the early achievers program are not able to meet the needs of the child; or

(c) The child is attending a preschool program prior to participating in family assessment response and the parent or caregiver does not want the child to change preschool programs.

(2) The family assessment response worker may make child care referrals for nonschool-aged children to licensed child care programs that rate at a level 3, 4, or 5 in the early achievers program described in RCW 43.215.100 unless:

(a) The family lives in an area with no local programs that rate at level 3, 4, or 5 in the early achievers program;

(b) The local child care programs that rate at a level 3, 4, or 5 in the early achievers program are not able to meet the needs of the child; or

(c) The child is attending a child care program prior to participating in family assessment response and the parent or caregiver does not want the child to change child care programs.

(3) The family assessment response worker shall, when appropriate, provide referrals to high quality child care and early learning programs.

(4) The family assessment response worker shall, when appropriate, provide referrals to state and federally subsidized programs such as, but not limited to, licensed child care programs that receive state subsidy pursuant to RCW 43.215.135; early childhood education and assistance programs; head start programs; and early head start programs.

(5) Prior to closing the family assessment response case, the family assessment response worker must, when appropriate, discuss child care and early learning services with the child's parent or caregiver.

(6) If the family plans to use child care or early learning services, the family assessment response worker must work with the family to facilitate enrollment.

(7) The family assessment response worker shall, if authorized by the family, make reasonable efforts to locate relatives or other suitable persons who can provide support to the family.

**Sec.**  RCW 74.13.065 and 2009 c 520 s 60 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The department or supervising agency shall conduct a social study whenever a child is placed in out-of-home care under the supervision of the department or supervising agency. The study shall be conducted prior to placement, or, if it is not feasible to conduct the study prior to placement due to the circumstances of the case, the study shall be conducted as soon as possible following placement.

(2) The social study shall include, but not be limited to, an assessment of the following factors:

(a) The physical and emotional strengths and needs of the child;

(b) Emotional bonds with siblings and the need to maintain regular sibling contacts;

(c) The proximity of the child's placement to the child's family to aid reunification;

(d) The possibility of placement with the child's relatives or extended family;

(e) The racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious background of the child;

(f) The least-restrictive, most family-like placement reasonably available and capable of meeting the child's needs; and

(g) Compliance with RCW 13.34.260 regarding parental preferences for placement of their children.

(3) The department shall conduct an extensive family search beginning at the time a child is placed in out-of-home care to fulfill the requirements of this section and the family search requirements in chapter 13.34 RCW.

**Sec.**  RCW 13.34.260 and 2011 c 89 s 5 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) In an attempt to minimize the inherent intrusion in the lives of families involved in the foster care system and to maintain parental authority where appropriate, the department, absent good cause, shall follow the wishes of the natural parent regarding the placement of the child with a relative or other suitable person pursuant to RCW 13.34.130. Preferences such as family constellation, sibling relationships, ethnicity, and religion shall be considered when matching children to foster homes. Parental authority is appropriate in areas that are not connected with the abuse or neglect that resulted in the dependency and shall be integrated through the foster care team.

(2) When a child is placed in out-of-home care, relatives, other suitable persons, and foster parents are encouraged to:

(a) Provide consultation to the foster care team based upon their experience with the child placed in their care;

(b) Assist the birth parents by helping them understand their child's needs and correlating appropriate parenting responses;

(c) Participate in educational activities, and enter into community-building activities with birth families and other foster families;

(d) Transport children to family time visits with birth families and assist children and their families in maximizing the purposefulness of family time.

(3) The department shall encourage and support continued relationships between birth families and adoptive parents when that relationship is in the best interest of the child.

(4) For purposes of this section:

(a) "Foster care team" means the relative, other suitable person, or foster parent currently providing care, the currently assigned department employee, and the parent or parents; and

(b) "Birth family" means the persons described in RCW 74.15.020(2)(a).

**--- END ---**