

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2506

As Reported By House Committee On:
Government Reform & Land Use

Title: An act relating to state government reorganization.

Brief Description: Creating the department of children and family services.

Sponsors: Representatives Reams, Romero, Bush, Boldt, Mielke, Cairnes, Mulliken, Lantz, Gardner, Thompson, Carrell, Cooke, O'Brien, Wolfe and D. Schmidt.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Government Reform & Land Use: 1/19/98, 1/22/98 [DP].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM & LAND USE

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Reams, Chairman; Cairnes, Vice Chairman; Sherstad, Vice Chairman; Bush; Mielke; Mulliken and Thompson.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Romero, Ranking Minority Member; Lantz, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Fisher and Gardner.

Staff: Joan Elgee (786-7135).

Background: The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) was established in 1970. The DSHS was designed to "integrate and coordinate all those activities involving provision of care for individuals who, as a result of their economic, social or health condition, require financial assistance, institutional care, rehabilitation, or other social and health services."

Approximately half of the clients of the DSHS are children and many of the functions of the agency are related to children and families. These functions include:

- collection of child support;
- child protective services;
- juvenile offenders services; and

- mental health, developmental disability and alcohol and substance abuse services for children.

A number of bills have been introduced over the last decade to separate some or all of these functions and create a separate department of children and family services.

Summary of Bill: A new Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is created, effective July 1, 1999. Transfers to the new DCFS follow the development of a reorganization plan.

All functions performed by the children's administration division of the DSHS (except child protective services) are transferred to the DCFS. Also transferred to the new department are the functions of the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (DCTED) pertaining to early childhood education assistance programs, head start programs, and youth violence contracts.

Other transfers are also made, with the allocation of functions to be determined by a plan. The functions of juvenile rehabilitation and the juvenile justice system are transferred to the Department of Corrections and the new DCFS. The Legislature intends that the reorganization plan consider which state agency is best suited to address the needs of various groups of juvenile offenders and the needs of society with respect to those juveniles.

The functions of the DSHS relating to child protective services are transferred to the new DCFS and the county sheriffs. The Legislature intends that the authority to conduct child abuse investigations should be transferred to the sheriffs in the larger counties. The plan must include recommendations as to the allocation of child protective service functions between the new DCFS, the county sheriffs, and other appropriate agencies.

The director of the Office of Financial Management, the secretary of the DSHS, the secretary of the Department of Corrections, and the director of the DCTED must develop a reorganization plan. The reorganization plan must be submitted to the Governor and the appropriate standing committees of the Legislature by November 15, 1998, and any proposed legislation necessary to implement the plan must be submitted by December 15, 1998.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 14, 1998.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on several effective dates. Please refer to the bill.

Testimony For: We heard this bill last year and the Governor asked us to wait a year. There are still problems which we need to resolve.

Testimony Against: A major reorganization is costly and will distract staff from program improvement. Six of 10 clients in the new agency would still need to be served in other programs within DSHS. Look instead at the recommendations of recent studies.

Testified: Representative Reams, prime sponsor (pro), Lyle Quasim, Department of Social and Health Services (con); Margaret Casey, Washington State Catholic Conference (con); Laurie Lippold, Children's Home Society (con); and George LeClair, Children's Alliance (con).