

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6474

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Human Services & Corrections, January 26, 2000

Title: An act relating to improving foster care services and the foster care rate structure.

Brief Description: Changing provisions relating to foster care services and reimbursements.

Sponsors: Senators Hargrove, McCaslin, Long, Costa, Sheahan, Patterson, Kline, Winsley, Haugen, Franklin and Gardner.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections: 1/14/2000, 1/26/2000 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6474 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Hargrove, Chair; Costa, Vice Chair; Franklin, Kohl-Welles, Long, Sheahan, Stevens and Zarelli.

Staff: Jennifer Strus (786-7484)

Background: In the last 12 years there have been numerous foster care initiatives, some instigated by the department, by the Governor, by outside providers or advocates, and others by the Legislature. In many of these initiatives, there have been some consistent recommendations: (1) create a foster care payment system that is equitable and consistent across the state; (2) create a foster care payment system that has different levels matching the severity of the child's needs and the foster parent's abilities; (3) provide training to foster parents that is specific to the needs of the child (ren) placed with them; and (4) refer more cases to child placing agencies (CPA), especially children who are legally free and are available for adoption. These recommendations have been met with varying success.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The Legislature intends to improve the quality of foster care services by requiring the department to emphasize the purchase of child welfare services from child placing agencies or other entities as provided under the Civil Service Act. Criteria the department must use when choosing which cases are to be managed by CPA are listed.

The specialized rate for family foster care is defined. The department is directed to discontinue payment of that rate to foster families.

Exceptional cost plans (ECP) are defined. Two levels of ECP are created. Level I has a maximum monthly reimbursement of \$2000; Level II has a maximum monthly reimbursement of \$750. Criteria are established for each level. The regional administrator may grant an exception to Level I if the foster child is severely medically fragile; requires

24-hour supervision; has severe emotional or physical disabilities; or an extensive history of inpatient mental health or substance abuse treatment. The regional administrator may not delegate his or her authority to grant an exception to Level I to a subordinate. If the regional administrator is not available, the exception is granted by the assistant secretary.

The department must develop a training curriculum for foster parents receiving the Level I or II ECP or an exception to Level I that must be completed annually to continue receiving the ECP. The type of training provided must directly relate to the needs of the child(ren) placed with them.

The department must increase by 15 percent over current levels the number of children being served by child placing agencies. The department must determine on a regional basis how the increase will occur. Outcome guidelines for child welfare services are established. A statewide policy for the provision of respite care for all foster parents is to be developed by September 1, 2000 and implemented by December 15, 2000. A quality improvement team is established to oversee the implementation of this bill.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: Criteria for referral of a case to child placing agencies is changed. Outcome measures comparing the provision of child welfare services by the department and those provided by child placing agencies are added. The department is required to establish and implement a statewide respite care policy. The department must convene a quality improvement team when responsibility is to oversee implementation of this bill. Level I and Level II of the ECP are reversed so that Level I is the lower rate and Level II is the higher rate.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 14, 2000.

Effective Date: Sections 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6 take effect on May 1, 2001.

Testimony For: Definition of and criteria for qualifying for ECP is long overdue. More training to foster parents on issues pertinent to the children in their care is positive.

Testimony Against: The department has a current contract with a consulting firm to assist them in restructuring their rate system. This bill is premature in light of this.

Testified: PRO: Roger Ott, Alan Willoughby, John Vail, foster parents; Darlene Flowers; Foster Parents Association of Washington State; Laurie Lippold, Children's Home Society; Mark Sullivan, FPAWS; CON: Rosie Oreskovich, DSHS; Vickie Waller, OFCO.