

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 1697

As of March 11, 2011

Title: An act relating to unannounced monthly visits to persons providing care to children in the dependency system.

Brief Description: Providing for unannounced visits to homes with dependent children.

Sponsors: House Committee on Early Learning & Human Services (originally sponsored by Representatives Roberts, Seaquist, Goodman, Orwall, Dickerson and Kenney).

Brief History: Passed House: 3/01/11, 82-15.

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections: 3/11/11.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Staff: Jennifer Strus (786-7316)

Background: State law requires that caseworkers with the Children's Administration (CA) in the Department of Social and Health Services and supervising agencies, monitor placements of children in out-of-home care and in-home dependencies to assure the children's safety. CA and supervising agencies must conduct a private and individual face-to-face visit with caregivers each month. Federal law also requires that children in out of home care are seen by a caseworker on a monthly basis.

Summary of Bill: CA and supervising agencies must randomly select no less than 10 percent of the caregivers currently providing care to receive one unannounced face-to-face visit in the caregiver's home per year. CA will not conduct an unannounced visit on a caregiver for two consecutive years. The caseworker must document his or her reasons for conducting an unannounced visit. If the caseworker makes a good faith effort to conduct the unannounced visit and is not able to do so, that month's visit to the caregiver need not be unannounced. CA and supervising agencies are encouraged to group monthly visits to caregivers by geographic area so that in the event the unannounced visit cannot be completed, the caseworker may complete other required monthly visits in the general vicinity.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This bill arose out of the Youth Summit held last year in Seattle. The youth attending the Summit recommended that unannounced visits be used to monitor the safety of the children in foster care. The bill is not a "gotcha" to foster parents, but a step to make sure we as a state are taking steps to ensure the safety of the children in foster care. The bill would apply to in-home dependencies as well as out of home dependencies, and implements what many see as a best practice in ensuring the safety of the kids in the foster care system. The homes selected for unannounced visits should be selected randomly but not by the social worker assigned to the case so there is no issue of retaliation against the foster parent. Social worker set up face-to-face visits about a week in advance and as a result allow caregivers in a specific case to create stories to explain why a child in kinship care had bruises. If this bill had been in place, there would have been a better chance to detect issues in the home.

CON: We have issues with entering homes without prior reasonable suspicion. It is not clear in the bill what happens if the worker shows up for an unannounced visit and the foster parent refuses to admit that worker. There should be language clarification that the social worker cannot just barge into a foster parent's home.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Roberts, prime sponsor; Jim Theofelis, Craig Bauer, Mockingbird Society.

CON: Shankar Narayan, ACLU.