

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6309

As of February 5, 2018

Title: An act relating to extending the timeline for completing a family assessment response.

Brief Description: Extending the timeline for completing a family assessment response.

Sponsors: Senators Darneille, Miloscia, O'Ban, Rivers, Frockt and Hunt.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections: 1/22/18, 1/24/18 [DP-WM].
Ways & Means: 2/05/18.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Extends the timeline for completing a family assessment response (FAR), upon parental agreement, from 90 to 120 days.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Darneille, Chair; Dhingra, Vice Chair; O'Ban, Ranking Member; Carlyle, Frockt, Miloscia and Walsh.

Staff: Brandon Popovac (786-7465)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Staff: Maria Hovde (786-7474)

Background: The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) began implementation of FAR, a differential response system for responding to allegations of child abuse and neglect with low to moderate risk of child maltreatment, in January 2014. FAR services were phased-in throughout the state until full implementation was completed on June 1, 2017.

Upon receiving a report of child abuse or neglect that is screened in as needing a response, DSHS must refer the case either for investigation or for a FAR. DSHS developed an assessment method to assign cases to be investigated or for a FAR based on factors that

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include: imminent danger, level of risk, number of previous child abuse or neglect reports, the type of alleged maltreatment, or the age of the alleged victim. Cases will receive a FAR unless the assessment determines that there is a risk of imminent harm to the child, a serious threat of substantial harm to the child, the conduct constitutes criminal activity, the child is abandoned, the child is a dependent, or the child is in a facility licensed by DSHS.

Parents must agree to participate in FAR services before services begin. If parents refuse initial FAR services, DSHS must provide a full investigation. DSHS must complete FAR services within 45 days of receiving the child abuse and neglect report, but parents may agree to extend the response period up to 90 days.

On July 1, 2018, the Department of Children, Youth, and Families will assume child welfare services from DSHS.

Summary of Bill: The timeline for completing a FAR, upon parental agreement, is extended from 90 to 120 days.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on July 1, 2018.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Human Services & Corrections): PRO: FAR is a great option for families and has shown good results. FAR implementation across the state over time was a good choice. With the Title IV-E waiver ending, the state would need to pick up the extra costs out of the general fund. No action has occurred on the federal level to extend the waiver. FAR is a great intervention program for families to receive essential support services in lieu of becoming involved with the court system. A November 2017 Washington State Institute for Public Policy study found that fewer than 10 percent of FAR families received a paid in-home service, and fewer than 3 percent received evidence-based program services. Evidence-based program dollars have been underutilized under the 90-day timeline. Extending the timeline would allow greater access to such services and prevent placements in foster care, which would save the state money.

OTHER: It is difficult to assess families and provide services when there is a timeline of 45 to 90 days to complete services. This current timeline can hamper efforts to provide child safety and interfere with fidelity to evidence-based treatment models.

Persons Testifying (Human Services & Corrections): PRO: Laurie Lippold, Partners for Our Children; Olivia Thai, Partners for Our Children; Mary Fischer, Institute for Family Development.

OTHER: Patrick Dowd, Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Human Services & Corrections): No one.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Ways & Means): PRO: This bill authorizes the department to extend the FAR program, but it does not require the department to do so. FAR has been implemented successfully in the state and it helps to keep children from entering the foster care system. FAR gives families involved in the child welfare system a greater chance of success. Parents find the program very helpful and some have expressed a wish for the program to be longer. Many evidence-based programs are designed to provide services for longer than the 90 days FAR currently allows. According to a study by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy, less than ten percent of FAR families received paid in-home services. Extending the duration of the FAR program will allow more families access to these services.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Alise Morrissey, Children's Home Society of Washington; Laurie Lippold, Partners for Our Children; Mary Fischer, Institute for Family Development, Washington Association for Children and Families.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Ways & Means): No one.