

HOUSE BILL REPORT

2SSB 5718

As Reported by House Committee On:
Human Services & Early Learning
Appropriations

Title: An act relating to establishing the child welfare housing assistance program that provides housing assistance to parents reunifying with a child and parents at risk of having a child removed.

Brief Description: Establishing the child welfare housing assistance program that provides housing assistance to parents reunifying with a child and parents at risk of having a child removed.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Saldaña, Hasegawa, Nguyen, O'Ban, Das, Keiser, Kuderer and Zeiger).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Human Services & Early Learning: 3/22/19, 3/28/19 [DPA];

Appropriations: 4/6/19, 4/8/19 [DPA(APP w/o HSEL)].

**Brief Summary of Second Substitute Bill
(As Amended by Committee)**

- Requires the Department of Children, Youth, and Families to establish a child welfare housing assistance pilot program in two counties, subject to funds appropriated for that purpose, that provides housing vouchers, rental assistance, navigation, and other support services to eligible families beginning July 1, 2020, and ending June 30, 2022.
- Allows a parent with a child who a court has found dependent, for whom the lack of appropriate housing is the primary remaining barrier to reunification, to be eligible for the pilot program.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & EARLY LEARNING

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Senn, Chair; Callan, Vice Chair; Frame, Vice Chair; Eslick, Assistant Ranking Minority Member;

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.

McCaslin, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Corry, Goodman, Griffey, Kilduff, Lovick and Ortiz-Self.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Klippert.

Staff: Luke Wickham (786-7146).

Background:

If an individual suspects that a child has been abused or neglected, that abuse or neglect can be reported to the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) Child Protective Services (CPS) office or to law enforcement. There are many individuals who are required by law to report suspected abuse or neglect.

The CPS office will then determine whether the report of child abuse or neglect is credible and whether the report meets the sufficiency screening criteria. If the report meets the screening criteria, the CPS office will assign either: (1) a 24-hour response that includes an investigation; or (2) a 72-hour response that includes a family assessment response for low-to moderate-risk allegations.

The DCYF, or anyone else, can file a court petition alleging that the child should be a dependent of the state due to abuse, neglect, or because no parent, guardian, or custodian is capable of adequately caring for the child. A court will hold a shelter care hearing following removal of a child from his or her home within 72 hours. At this hearing, the court will determine if the child can return home safely.

Summary of Amended Bill:

Beginning July 1, 2020, the DCYF must establish a child welfare housing assistance pilot program (CWHAPP) intended to shorten the time that children remain in out-of-home care that provides housing vouchers, rental assistance, navigation, and other support services to eligible families. This program is limited to one county in Eastern Washington and one county in Western Washington.

A parent with a child who a court has found dependent, and for whom the lack of appropriate housing is the primary remaining barrier to reunification, is eligible for the CWHAPP.

The DCYF must contract with an outside entity or entities to operate the CWHAPP. If no outside entity or entities are available to operate the program or specific parts of the CWHAPP, the DCYF may operate the program or the specific parts that are not operated by an outside entity.

Families may be referred to the CWHAPP by a caseworker, attorney, guardian ad litem, child welfare parent mentor, Office of Public Defense (OPD) social worker, or the court.

The DCYF must convene a stakeholder group to assist the DCYF in the design of the CWHAPP. The stakeholder group must include:

- parent allies;
- parent attorneys and social workers managed by the OPD Parent Representation Program;
- the Department of Commerce;
- housing experts;
- community-based organizations;
- advocates; and
- behavioral health providers.

By December 1, 2021, the DCYF must report on outcomes for the CWHAPP to the stakeholder group and the Oversight Board for the DCYF. The report must include racial, geographic, ethnic, and gender distribution of program support.

The CWHAPP is subject to the availability of funds appropriated for this purpose and will expire on June 30, 2022.

Amended Bill Compared to Second Substitute Bill:

The amended bill limits the child welfare housing assistance pilot program to one county in Eastern Washington and one county in Western Washington.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on March 29, 2019.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) There is a real housing crisis in the state. Many families would be able to reunite with the help of this bill. Unfortunately this is not an isolated problem. Cases where children are not returned home due to lack of appropriate housing have a significant cost to the state. Children are languishing in care, including in hotel rooms and DCYF offices, due to the lack of suitable housing. There are costs to continuing these cases based on the attorneys, services, caseworkers, and others who continue working on these cases while they remain open.

Families have a difficult time finding affordable housing. When a parent has done everything to get their lives in order to reunify with children, with the one remaining barrier appropriate housing, those families should be provided the housing needed to reunify with their children.

The DCYF has a problem with staff turnover, and one of the reasons for that high turnover is that staff indicate when leaving that they were not able to assist families more. This program will provide the ability for staff to have a more rewarding experience because it will increase the ability for social workers to provide support to families.

This pilot program has an end date. It is believed that there are around 600 families who would be eligible for this program, but the way this program is currently set up, there is flexibility to serve as many parents as funding provides.

When reunification is postponed, children experience increased trauma. Some families need specialized housing based on trauma history. Social workers would like to reunify families as soon as possible, but some families are kept apart for six months or more solely based on the lack of suitable housing.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Saldaña, prime sponsor; Jason Bragg, Washington State Parent Ally Committee; Frank Ordway, Department of Children, Youth, and Families; Laurie Lippold, Partners for Our Children; and Sharonda Amamillo, Thurston County Public Defense.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended by Committee on Appropriations and without amendment by Committee on Human Services & Early Learning. Signed by 31 members: Representatives Ormsby, Chair; Bergquist, 2nd Vice Chair; Robinson, 1st Vice Chair; Stokesbary, Ranking Minority Member; MacEwen, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Rude, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Caldier, Chandler, Cody, Dolan, Dye, Fitzgibbon, Hansen, Hoff, Hudgins, Jinkins, Macri, Mosbrucker, Pettigrew, Pollet, Ryu, Schmick, Senn, Springer, Stanford, Steele, Sullivan, Sutherland, Tarleton, Tharinger and Ybarra.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Kraft.

Staff: Mary Mulholland (786-7391).

Summary of Recommendation of Committee On Appropriations Compared to Recommendation of Committee On Human Services & Early Learning:

The bill is null and void unless funding is provided in the omnibus appropriations act by June 30, 2019.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed. However, the bill is null and void unless funded in the budget.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Parents with firsthand experience in the child welfare system know that housing can be the biggest barrier to family reunification. Parents need to have a large enough home to house their children when their children return from foster care. It can be difficult to find an affordable home that is large enough for families with multiple children. Many available housing units limit the number of children who can reside in a unit. The challenge of securing appropriate housing for biological parents means that children can linger in foster care, which increases costs in the courts and child welfare systems. It is important to address a family's basic necessities. The proposal is among the first real attempts to address the effects of the housing crisis on child welfare. The Department of Children, Youth, and Families cannot remove a child from his family solely due to homelessness, but the courts may consider housing when deciding whether a child in foster care can reunify with his family. There are organizations that are interested in the contract that would be offered under the proposal. The proposal is scalable.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Tonya Adams; Dawn Michele Wilson, Kitsap County Juvenile Family and Court Services, Washington State Office of Public Defense, and Salvation Army; and Laurie Lippold, Partners for Our Children.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.