

RCW 43.216.005 Findings. (1) The legislature finds that state services are not currently organized and delivered in a way that achieves the optimal outcomes for children, youth, and families. The legislature believes that, to improve service delivery and outcomes, existing services must be restructured into a comprehensive agency dedicated to the safety, development, and well-being of children that emphasizes prevention, early childhood development, and early intervention, and supporting parents to be their children's first and most important teachers.

(2) The legislature finds that:

(a) The early years of a child's life are critical to the child's healthy brain development and that the quality of caregiving during the early years can significantly impact the child's intellectual, social, and emotional development;

(b) A successful outcome for every child obtaining a K-12 education depends on children being prepared from birth for academic and social success in school. For children at risk of school failure, the opportunity gap often emerges as early as eighteen months of age;

(c) A more cohesive and integrated early learning system has been established that provides a solid foundation for further improvements in the quality and availability of early learning programs; and

(d) Increasing the availability of high quality services for children ages birth to three and their parents or caregivers will result in improved school and life outcomes.

(3) Research is clear that quality culturally and linguistically responsive early care and education builds the foundation for a child's success in school and in life. In restructuring early learning and child welfare services, the legislature seeks to build on the success of Washington's early learning efforts to assure children most at risk of experiencing adversity are provided high quality early learning experiences.

(4) The legislature finds that advancements in research and science have identified indicators of risk, how they impact healthy development, and the critical importance of stable, nurturing relationships, particularly in the early years. Services for families and children should be prioritized for those who are most at risk of neglect, physical harm, and other adverse factors.

(5) The legislature finds that a focus on adolescent development is needed to ensure that effective supports and interventions are targeted to support adolescents successfully transitioning to adulthood. Youth known to both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems often suffer from childhood trauma, have multisystem involvement, and experience homelessness. Increased integration of the child welfare and juvenile justice systems can increase opportunities for prevention and improve outcomes for youth in both systems.

(6) The legislature finds that children and youth of color are disproportionately impacted at every point in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. The department of children, youth, and families must prioritize addressing equity, disproportionality, and disparity in service delivery and outcomes, and provide transparent, frequent reporting of outcomes by race, ethnicity, and geography. The legislature finds that the state values the partnership with tribes in providing services for our children and youth and intends to honor the government-to-government relationship between the state and tribes.

(7) The department of children, youth, and families must be anchored in a culture of innovation, transparency, accountability,

rigorous data analysis, and reliance on research and evidence-based interventions.

(8) The legislature finds that the public expects an effective service delivery system that is comprehensive, accountable, and goes beyond a single department's role. For this reason, the legislature is creating a mechanism in the department of children, youth, and families to align, integrate, and ensure accountability of state services for children, youth, and their families across state agencies so that there is a seamless, effective, prevention and early intervention-based service system regardless of which state agency is responsible for particular services.

(9) The legislature finds that the work of the department of children, youth, and families will only be as successful as the workforce—both the agency employees and community-based providers. Increased support for the professionals working with children, youth, and families is critical to improving outcomes.

(10) The legislature further finds that other states have successfully established integrated departments dedicated to serving children, youth, and families. These departments have improved the visibility of child and family issues, increased authority and accountability, enabled system improvements, and created a stronger focus on improving child outcomes. [2017 3rd sp.s. c 6 s 1.]