

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1070

As Reported By House Committee On:

Government Reform & Land Use

Title: An act relating to state government reorganization.

Brief Description: Creating the department of children and family services.

Sponsors: Representatives Reams, Thompson, Boldt, Carrell, Dunn and O'Brien.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Government Reform & Land Use: 1/20/97, 2/24/97 [DPS].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM & LAND USE

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Reams, Chairman; Cairnes, Vice Chairman; Sherstad, Vice Chairman; Bush; Mielke; Mulliken and Thompson.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Romero, Ranking Minority Member; Lantz, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Fisher and Gardner.

Staff: Joan Elgee (786-7135).

Background: The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) was established in 1970. The DSHS was designed to "integrate and coordinate all those activities involving provision of care for individuals who, as a result of their economic, social or health condition, require financial assistance, institutional care, rehabilitation, or other social and health services."

Approximately half of the clients of the DSHS are children and many of the functions of the agency are related to children and families. These functions include collection of child support, child protective services, services for juvenile offenders, and mental health, developmental disabilities, and alcohol and substance abuse services for children. Numerous bills have been introduced over the last decade to separate some or all of these functions and create a separate department of children and family services.

Summary of Substitute Bill: A new Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is created, effective July 1, 1998. Transfers to the new DCFS follow the development of a reorganization plan.

All functions performed by the children's administration division of the DSHS (except child protective services) are transferred to the DCFS. Also transferred to the new department are the functions of the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (DCTED) pertaining to early childhood education assistance programs, head start programs, and youth violence contracts.

Other transfers are also made, with the allocation of functions to be determined by a plan. The functions of juvenile rehabilitation and the juvenile justice system are transferred to the Department of Corrections and the new DCFS. The Legislature intends that the reorganization plan consider which state agency is best suited to address the needs of various groups of juvenile offenders and the needs of society with respect to those juveniles.

The functions of the DSHS relating to child protective services are transferred to the new DCFS and the county sheriffs. The Legislature intends that the authority to conduct child abuse investigations should be transferred to the sheriffs in the larger counties. The plan must include recommendations as to the allocation of child protective service functions between the new DCFS, the county sheriffs, and other appropriate agencies.

The director of the Office of Financial Management, the secretary of DSHS, the secretary of the Department of Corrections, and the director of the DCTED must develop a reorganization plan. The reorganization plan must be submitted to the Governor and the appropriate standing committees of the Legislature by November 15, 1997, and any proposed legislation necessary to implement the plan must be submitted by December 15, 1997.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: Child support, and the divisions of mental health, developmental disabilities, and alcohol and substance abuse (with respect to children) are no longer transferred to the new DCFS. The provisions relating to program fraud and internal investigations are deleted.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed, except for sec. 12 which has an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Testimony For: There is no advocate for children at the cabinet level. The DSHS is way too big and needs to be broken down into smaller pieces. Clients get pushed from person to person, and it's very hard to get answers. Many people have reported that an incident with the DSHS has destroyed their family. There are no advocates to help get through the system.

Testimony Against: Recent studies (Deloitte Touche, Washington Institute for Public Policy) and the Governor's Roundtable do not recommend reorganization. Children's needs are not separate from housing, cash grants, and other programs. Don't do form before function. Integration is more important than fragmentation. Legislators should ask whether a structural change will improve service delivery. The new ombudsman for children may solve the problem of no advocate at the cabinet level.

Testified: Representative Reams, prime sponsor (pro); Lyle Quasim, Secretary, and Rosie Oreskovich, Assistant Secretary of Children's Administration, Department of Social and Health Services (concerns); George LeClair, Children's Alliance (con); Janet Adams, ARC of Washington State (con); Lonnie Johns-Brown, Washington Association for the Education of Young Children (con); Margaret Casey, Washington State Catholic Conference (con); Laurie Lippold, Children's Home Society (con); Randy Parr (concerns); and Jamaica Filgo (pro).