

HOUSE BILL REPORT

2SSB 5486

As Passed House:
April 13, 2015

Title: An act relating to creating the parents for parents program.

Brief Description: Creating the parents for parents program.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Frockt, O'Ban, Darneille, Fraser, Miloscia, Rolfes, Hargrove, Billig, Ranker, Hewitt, Kohl-Welles and McAuliffe).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Early Learning & Human Services: 3/20/15, 3/24/15 [DP];
Appropriations: 4/6/15, 4/7/15 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 4/13/15, 83-14.

Brief Summary of Second Substitute Bill

- Requires that the Parent for Parent (PFP) program be funded by a pass-through from the Office of Public Defense to a non-profit lead organization with extensive experience supporting veteran parents, subject to the availability of funds.
- Identifies the components of the PFP program to include outreach, support, education, and peer support groups for parents involved in the dependency court system.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & HUMAN SERVICES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Walkinshaw, Vice Chair; Walsh, Ranking Minority Member; Dent, Hawkins, Kilduff, Ortiz-Self, Sawyer and Senn.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Scott, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; McCaslin.

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.

Staff: Luke Wickham (786-7146).

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 29 members: Representatives Hunter, Chair; Ormsby, Vice Chair; Chandler, Ranking Minority Member; Parker, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Wilcox, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Carlyle, Cody, Dent, Dunshee, Fagan, Haler, Hansen, Hudgins, G. Hunt, S. Hunt, Jinkins, Kagi, Lytton, MacEwen, Magendanz, Pettigrew, Sawyer, Senn, Springer, Stokesbary, Sullivan, Tharinger, Van Werven and Walkinshaw.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Buys, Condotta and Taylor.

Staff: Meghan Bunch (786-7119).

Background:

Dependency Court System.

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) may file a petition in court alleging that a child should be a dependent of the state due to abuse, neglect, or because there is no parent, guardian, or custodian capable of adequately caring for the child.

If a court determines that a child is dependent, then the court will conduct periodic reviews and make determinations regarding the child's placement, the provision of services by the DSHS, compliance of the parents, and whether progress has been made by the parents.

Under certain circumstances after a child has been removed from the custody of a parent for at least six months pursuant to a finding of dependency, a petition may be filed seeking termination of parental rights.

Parent for Parent Program.

The goal of the Parent for Parent (PFP) program is to increase early engagement of birth parents newly entering the dependency process through education and peer support coordinated by birth parents, referred to as veteran parents, who have successfully navigated the child welfare system.

The PFP program currently exists in nine counties: Grays Harbor, Pacific, King, Kitsap, Pierce, Snohomish, Spokane, Thurston, and Mason.

Summary of Bill:

Components of the PFP program are defined to include the following:

- outreach and support to parents at dependency-related hearings, beginning with the shelter care hearing;
- a class to educate parents on the dependency court process;
- ongoing support to help parents achieve their case plan; and
- structured, curriculum-based peer support groups.

"Child welfare parent mentor" is defined to mean a parent who has successfully resolved the issues that led the parent's child into the dependency court system, and who has an interest in working collaboratively to improve the lives of children and families.

Parent for Parent Program Organization.

Subject to the availability of funds, the PFP program must be funded by a pass-through from the Office of Public Defense to a nonprofit lead organization with extensive experience supporting veteran parents. Through a contract with a lead organization, each local program must be administered by the county superior court or a nonprofit organization.

Local stakeholders representing child welfare systems must serve as PFP program advisors. A veteran parent lead must provide program coordination and maintain local program information.

The lead organization must provide:

- ongoing training to the host organizations;
- statewide program oversight and coordination; and
- maintain statewide program information.

Evaluation of Parent for Parent Program.

Subject to the availability of funds, a child welfare research entity must conduct an evaluation of the PFP program to determine whether the program can be considered a research-based program. A preliminary report must be submitted to the Legislature by December 1, 2016. A subsequent report must be delivered to the Legislature by December 1, 2019.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Early Learning & Human Services):

(In support) Many parents involved with the dependency process are told that they will never reunite with their children. With the help of child welfare parent mentors, many of these parents are able to overcome large barriers to reunite with their children. The support of the PFP program is essential in helping families to reunite. The Washington Corrections Center for Women allows for mothers to engage in some services.

The Thurston County dependency court system has evolved from a highly antagonistic system to a collaborative one that includes child welfare parent mentors. These parent mentors attend all shelter care hearings and are often the first person that a parent perceives as a safe person in a traumatic system. The mentorship that they provide has as much weight and gravity as the paid professionals.

Many dependency cases involve substance abuse, and parent mentors demonstrate that these obstacles can be overcome. Peer mentors who have successfully navigated the system offer instant credibility, support, advocacy, and compliment the other professionals in the system. The parent mentors help get children home sooner and save the state money that would have been paid to support foster care. Many parent mentors are identified by professionals who suggest parents for the program. The parents are sometimes paid a small stipend, but often volunteer their time.

Dependency cases are very confusing for parents and children. It can be scary for a parent to trust someone that offers to help them in the dependency process. However, parent mentors have credibility that no one else can provide having been through the process. Many parent mentors will sit down with parents and help them email their social worker and stress the importance of maintaining a positive relationship with their social worker.

The Office of Public Defense is in full support of this bill, and acknowledges the power and importance of the PFP program.

(Opposed) None.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Appropriations):

(In support) The companion bill, Substitute House Bill 1728, previously passed out of the House Appropriations Committee with only four members opposed. The benefits of the Parent for Parent (PFP) program include early engagement, increased rates of reunification, and decreased rates of parental termination, which all save the state money. A father's previous testimony on the bill was just one example of the benefits of providing for shorter foster care stays, which are costly. The PFP program focuses on a two-generational model to work towards economic stability for parents' mentors, reduce dependence on the state system, and ensure children are raised in stable and stress-free environments. This bill passed unanimously in the Senate and is referenced in both House and Senate 2015-17 budget proposals. The Office of Public Defense (OPD) is on board to formalize the PFP program, pass-through the funds, and administer the program. The OPD would not charge an administrative fee to manage the funds for the nonprofit organization.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying (Early Learning & Human Services): Chandra Perry, Alise Hegle, and Jason Bragg, Washington State Parent Advocacy; and Mark Collins and Jacob D'Annunzio, Washington State Office of Public Defense.

Persons Testifying (Appropriations): Alise Hegle, Catalyst for Kids and Washington State Parent Advocacy Committee; and Sophia Byrd McSherry, Office of Public Defense.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Early Learning & Human Services): None.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Appropriations): None.