

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1749

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

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: Representatives Robinson, Macri, Senn, Appleton, Jinkins, Lovick, Ortiz-Self, Doglio, Stanford, Riccelli, Slatter, Valdez, Frame, Santos and Davis.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Human Services & Early Learning: 2/8/19, 2/13/19 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) to establish a child welfare housing assistance program that provides housing vouchers, rental assistance, navigation, and other support services to eligible families.
- Defines eligible families to include: (1) parents with a child who a court has found dependent and lack of appropriate housing is the primary remaining barrier to reunification; and (2) parents with a child who is at risk of removal by the DCYF based on a lack of appropriate housing, who will only be served if there are remaining funds for the program.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & EARLY LEARNING

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Senn, Chair; Callan, Vice Chair; Frame, Vice Chair; Goodman, Kilduff, Lovick and Ortiz-Self.

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.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Dent, Ranking Minority Member; Eslick, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; McCaslin, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Corry, Griffey and 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 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, CPS will assign either: (1) a 24-hour response that includes an investigation; or (2) a family assessment response for low to moderate risk allegations that requires a 72-hour response.

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 Bill:

The DCYF will establish a child welfare housing assistance program (CWHAP) that provides housing vouchers, rental assistance, navigation, and other support services to eligible families.

Families eligible for the CWHAP include: (1) parents with a child who a court has found dependent and lack of appropriate housing is the primary remaining barrier to reunification; and (2) parents with a child who is at risk of removal by the DCYF based on a lack of appropriate housing, who will only be served if there are remaining funds for the program after serving all eligible families in the other eligibility category.

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

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

The DCYF must convene a stakeholder group to assist the DCYF in design of the CWHAP and then provide input regarding the CWHAP. The stakeholder group must include:

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

The DCYF must report annually on outcomes for the CWHAP to the stakeholder group and the Oversight Board for the DCYF.

The court must inquire whether referral to the CWHAP is appropriate during a shelter care hearing (first hearing after a child is removed from a parent) and at six-month dependency review hearings.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 2, 2019.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This creates a cross-sector program for child welfare housing. There are unique needs of families seeking to reunify with their children, and this bill would help support those unique needs. The DCYF must help provide housing support to families to help family reunification. Housing continues to be the leading barrier to keep kids safe and families reunifying. Many parents work hard to overcome these barriers. The longer children are separated from their parents, the more trauma and negative effects are experienced by those children. Please remember that people do change and families do reunite. Children should not linger in foster care when housing is the only barrier to reunification. Too many families in Washington are torn apart and kept apart based on homelessness. The law prohibits the removal of children solely based on homelessness, but this is often a significant factor leading to removal or preventing reunification. Foster care is the most expensive form of housing, and this bill would save money by returning children to parents.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Katara Jordan, Building Changes; Kimberly Mays; Bill Jones; Pier Peterson and Tonia McClalahan, Washington State Office of Public Defense; and Laurie Lippold, Partners for Our Children.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.