
Human Services & Early Learning Committee

HB 2525

Brief Description: Establishing the family connections program.

Sponsors: Representatives Callan, Corry, Eslick, Springer, Orwall, Ortiz-Self, Shewmake, Goodman, Senn, Caldier, Dent, Leavitt, Davis, Doglio, J. Johnson and Pollet.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) to contract with an external organization or organizations with experience serving youth or families receiving out-of-home care services to implement and operate the Family Connections Program (FCP) in one location in Eastern Washington and one location in Western Washington.
- Requires the DCYF to collect data and measure outcomes for families engaging in the FCP and provide a report that includes a plan for expanding the program by September 1, 2021.

Hearing Date: 1/24/20

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

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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.

Child Welfare Parents for Parents Program.

The Parents for Parents (PFP) program provides outreach and support to parents at dependency-related hearings, beginning with the shelter care hearing from other parents who have successfully resolved the issues that led the parent's child into the care of the juvenile dependency court system, resulting in family reunification or another permanency outcome.

Child Welfare Housing Assistance Pilot Program.

The DCYF must establish a child welfare housing assistance pilot program (CWHAPP) by July 1, 2020, that provides housing support to eligible families. For the purposes of the pilot, the DCYF must consult with a stakeholder group to create eligibility criteria, including creating a definition of homelessness for the purposes of the program.

Summary of Bill:

The DCYF is required, beginning September 1, 2020, to contract with an external organization or organizations with experience serving youth or families receiving out-of-home care services to implement and operate the family connections program in:

- one location west of the crest of the Cascade mountains, and
- one location east of the crest of the Cascade mountains.

The Family Connections Program (FCP) must facilitate interaction between a parent of a child found to be dependent and in out-of-home care and the individual with whom the child is placed. The FCP must also determine whether an in-person meeting between a parent of a child found to be dependent and in out-of-home care and the individual with whom the child is placed is appropriate by considering whether:

- the parent of a child found to be dependent and in out-of-home care and the individual with whom the child is placed are willing to participate in an in-person meeting; and
- safety concerns exist such that an in-person meeting should not occur.

If the FCP determines that an in-person meeting should occur, the FCP must provide a referral to the FCP team, which must:

- ensure that the parent ally contact the parent to prepare for an in-person meeting between the parent and caregiver;
- ensure that the experienced caregiver contact the caregiver to prepare for an in-person meeting between the parent and caregiver;
- convene an in-person meeting between the parent and caregiver; and
- provide ongoing support to the parent and caregiver following the in-person meeting.

The DCYF must collect data and measure outcomes for families engaging in the FCP and provide a report that includes a plan for expanding the program by September 1, 2021.

The term "child welfare parent mentor" that currently exists in statute in reference to the PFP program and the CWHAPP is replaced with the term "parent ally."

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 16, 2020.

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