
Human Services & Early Learning Committee

SB 6556

Brief Description: Expanding reporting options for mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect.

Sponsors: Senators Cleveland, Darneille and Wilson, C.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) to implement: (1) a web-based reporting portal accessible to mandated reporters for reporting child abuse and neglect; and (2) a call-back option for callers placed on hold to provide a phone number for the DCYF to return a call to complete the report of child abuse and neglect.

Hearing Date: 2/25/20

Staff: Luke Wickham (786-7146).

Background:

Reports of Child Abuse or Neglect.

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 identified below who are required by law to report suspected abuse or neglect.

Individuals may call a toll-free number (1-866-ENDHARM) to report child abuse or neglect. This number is often referred to as the ENDHARM line. The operator will connect a caller with the right DCYF office to receive a report. In fiscal year 2019, the DCYF received 125,975 reports of child abuse or neglect. According to the DCYF, callers during peak times have near hour-long wait times in some areas.

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.

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, the 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.

Mandatory Reporting Laws and Offenses.

Mandatory reporting laws require certain people to report suspected child abuse or neglect to the DCYF or to law enforcement when a reporter has reasonable cause to believe that a child has suffered abuse or neglect.

People designated as mandatory reporters include any:

- practitioner;
- county coroner;
- medical examiner;
- law enforcement officer;
- professional school personnel;
- registered or licensed nurse;
- social service counselor;
- psychologist;
- pharmacist;
- employee of the Department of Early Learning;
- licensed or certified child care providers or their employees;
- employee of the Department of Social and Health Services;
- juvenile probation officer;
- placement and liaison specialist;
- responsible living skills program staff;
- HOPE center staff;
- state Family and Children's Ombuds or any volunteer in the Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds;
- Department of Corrections personnel;
- guardians ad litem;
- court-appointed special advocates;
- any person in an official supervisory capacity with a profit or nonprofit organization;
- administrative, academic, or athletic department employees of institutions of higher learning; and
- any adult who has reasonable cause to believe that a child who resides with the adult is a victim of abuse or neglect.

Additionally, any person who has reason to believe that child abuse or neglect has occurred may report that information.

Upon having reasonable cause to believe a child has suffered abuse or neglect, a mandatory reporter must make a report within 48 hours. When any person is required to make a report, or cause a report to be made, and knowingly fails to make, or fails to cause such a report to be made, that person is guilty of a gross misdemeanor. A gross misdemeanor must be proved beyond a reasonable doubt and is punishable by a fine of up to \$5,000 and/or imprisonment in a county jail of up to 364 days.

Summary of Bill:

The DCYF must establish, develop, and implement:

- a web-based reporting portal accessible to mandated reporters for reporting child abuse and neglect; and
- a call-back option for callers placed on hold to provide a phone number for the DCYF to return a call to complete the report of child abuse and neglect.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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