

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1747

As Reported by House Committee On:
Children, Youth & Families

Title: An act relating to supporting relative placements in child welfare proceedings.

Brief Description: Supporting relative placements in child welfare proceedings.

Sponsors: Representatives Ortiz-Self, Taylor, Davis, Peterson, Ryu, Orwall, Dolan, Simmons, Ramos, Wicks, Valdez, Fitzgibbon, Morgan, Stonier, Goodman, Ormsby, Macri, Harris-Talley and Frame.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Children, Youth & Families: 1/24/22, 1/27/22 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Expands the good cause exception to the requirement that the court require the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) to file a termination petition if a child is in out-of-home care for 15 of the last 22 months to include circumstances where the DCYF has not yet met with the caregiver for the child to discuss guardianship as an alternative to adoption or the court has determined that guardianship is an appropriate permanent plan.
- Requires the court to consider the efforts taken by the DCYF to support a guardianship and whether a guardianship is available as a permanent option for the child when considering one of the required elements of a termination of parental rights petition.
- Expands the subsidy program for eligible relatives appointed by the court to include limited guardians of a minor.
- Prohibits a child who is placed with a relative or other suitable person from being moved, unless, under certain criteria, the court finds that a change in circumstances necessitates a change in placement.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Senn, Chair; Harris-Talley, Vice Chair; Rule, Vice Chair; Dent, Ranking Minority Member; Chase, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; McCaslin, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Callan, Eslick, Goodman, Klippert, Ortiz-Self and Wicks.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Young.

Staff: Luke Wickham (786-7146).

Background:

Child Welfare (Dependency) Court Proceedings.

Anyone, including the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF), 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. These petitions must be verified and contain a statement of facts that constitute a dependency and the names and residence of the parents, if known.

When a child is taken into custody, the court is to hold a shelter care hearing within 72 hours. The primary purpose of the shelter care hearing is to determine whether the child can be immediately and safely returned home while the dependency case is being resolved.

If a court finds the need to maintain a child out of the home, the shelter care status remains until a dependency fact-finding hearing is held or the parties enter an agreed order of dependency. The fact finding must be held within 75 days after the filing of the petition unless exceptional reasons for a continuance are found.

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

The DCYF must develop a permanency plan within 60 days from the date that the DCYF assumes responsibility for the child which must identify primary outcome goals for the case. The DCYF must submit this permanency plan to the parties and the court at least 14 days before a permanency planning court hearing. A permanency planning hearing must be held in all cases where the child has remained in out-of-home care for at least nine months, but no later than 12 months following out-of-home placement.

During a permanency planning hearing, the court must order the DCYF to file a petition seeking termination of parental rights if the child has been in out-of-home care for 15 of the

last 22 months since the date the dependency petition was filed unless the court makes a good cause exception as to why the filing of a termination of parental rights petition is not appropriate.

Guardianship.

There are two types of guardianships that are recognized during child welfare proceedings: a guardianship restricted to parties in a dependency case and a broader guardianship that is not limited to the parties of a dependency case. Unlike adoption, neither of these guardianships require termination of parental rights.

Dependency-Specific Guardianship.

A dependency-specific guardianship allows any party to a dependency proceeding to file a petition in juvenile court seeking a guardianship, with notice provided to all the parties in the dependency case. This is sometimes referred to as a "Title 13" guardianship based on the location of this guardianship in the law and in contrast to the broader "Title 11" guardianship described below.

To be designated as a proposed guardian, a person must be age 21 or older and must meet minimum requirements to care for children established by the DCYF. A guardianship may be established if the court finds by a preponderance of the evidence that it is in the child's best interests to establish a guardianship, rather than to terminate the parent-child relationship and proceed with adoption, or continue to return custody of the child to the parent and:

- all parties agree to the entry of the guardianship order and the proposed guardian is qualified, appropriate, and capable of carrying out the duties of a guardian; or
- the child has been found dependent, removed from the custody of the parent for at least six consecutive months, services have been offered or provided to the parent, there is little likelihood that the child can be returned to the parent in the near future, and the proposed guardian acknowledged the guardian's rights and responsibilities to the child committing to care for the child until the child reaches age 18.

In all guardianship proceedings, the court must appoint a guardian ad litem or attorney for the child.

Except in limited circumstances, the court may not establish a guardianship for a child who has no legal parent.

Any party to a guardianship may request termination of the guardianship by filing a petition and supporting affidavit alleging a substantial change has occurred in the circumstances of the child or the guardian and that the termination is necessary to serve the best interests of the child. The court may terminate a guardianship on the agreement of the guardian, the child (if the child is age 12 or older), and the parent seeking to regain custody of the child if the court finds by a preponderance of the evidence that the parent has successfully corrected the parenting deficiencies identified by the court in the dependency case, among other

things.

A guardian or a parent of the child may petition the court to modify the visitation provisions of a guardianship. The court must deny such a petition unless adequate cause is found.

A guardianship remains in effect until the child turns age 18 or the court terminates the guardianship, whichever is sooner.

Limited Guardianship of a Minor.

A person interested in the welfare of a minor, including the minor themselves, may petition for the appointment of a guardian in a broader guardianship process that is not limited to parties involved in a dependency case. This is sometimes referred to as a "Title 11" guardianship based on the location of this guardianship in the law. After a petition is filed for this type of guardianship, a person becomes a guardian for a minor only on appointment of the court. The court may appoint a guardian if the court finds that the appointment is in the minor's best interest and:

- each parent consents;
- all parental rights have been terminated; or
- there is clear and convincing evidence that no parent of the minor is willing or able to exercise parenting functions.

In the interest of maintaining or encouraging involvement by a minor's parent in the minor's life, developing self-reliance of the minor, or for other good cause, the court may create a limited guardianship by limiting the powers otherwise granted to a guardian. When establishing a Title 11 guardianship of a minor, the court shall state rights retained by the parent, which must preserve the parent-child relationship through an order for parent-child visitation and other contact, unless the court finds the relationship should be limited or restricted, and which may include decision-making regarding the minor's health care, education, or other matter, or access to a record regarding the minor.

An order granting guardianship for a minor must state that the parent of the minor is entitled to notice that:

- the guardian has delegated custody of the minor;
- the court has modified or limited the powers of the guardian; or
- the court has removed the guardian.

Relative Guardian Subsidy.

The DCYF operates a subsidy program for eligible relatives appointed by the court as a guardian under the guardianship specific to dependency cases.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Good Cause Exception.

The good cause exception to the requirement that the court require the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) to file a termination petition if a child is in out-of-home care for 15 of the last 22 months is expanded to include circumstances where the DCYF has not yet met with the caregiver for the child to discuss guardianship as an alternative to adoption or the court has determined that guardianship is an appropriate permanent plan.

If a child has been in the home of a foster parent or relative for more than six months, the court must instruct the DCYF to discuss guardianship as a permanent option for the child with the child's parents and caregiver as an alternative to termination of parental rights and adoption.

No child who is placed with a relative or other suitable person may be moved, unless, under certain criteria, the court finds that a change in circumstances necessitates a change in placement.

The court must consider the efforts taken by the DCYF to support a guardianship and whether a guardianship is available as a permanent option for the child when considering one of the required elements of a termination of parental rights petition.

The existing placement standards that apply during a dispositional hearing continue to apply throughout the life of the case, except that the court need not consider whether reunification with the parent will be hindered when evaluating relative placements after a parent's rights are terminated.

The subsidy program for eligible relatives appointed by the court is expanded to include limited guardianship of a minor.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill restores the ability for the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) to file a termination of parental rights when the court has entered a finding of good cause.

The substitute bill modifies the provision relating to the criteria required for a termination of parental rights petition to require that the court consider the efforts taken by the DCYF to support a guardianship and whether a guardianship is available as a permanent option for the child.

The substitute bill restores authority for the DCYF to place the child in a licensed foster home or take other suitable measures for the care and welfare of the child, while specifying that the relevant placement standards that exist at the beginning of a dependency case apply throughout the life of the case.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 11, 2022.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The trauma of removing children from their families must be stopped.

There are children who experience failed adoptions and then discover relatives that would have been interested in receiving placement of those children.

It is important to utilize preventative measures to keep children with their family members. The child welfare system utilizes relatives to care for children but does not provide as much financial support for these relatives as provided to licensed foster parents.

Families should have the right to determine the long-term direction of a case. In many cases, it does not make sense to sever the parent-child relationship. Adoption requires the replacement of legal parents on a birth certificate—erasing a child's past.

Many foster parents recognize the importance of youth maintaining relationships with relatives and parents. The number of relatives and parents involved in a child's life is critical to minimizing trauma.

This bill aligns with the research and acts of the United States Congress. There is no significant difference in stability between adoption and guardianship. Guardianship does not require termination of parental rights.

Support should be given to kinship care providers so they can care for family members. This bill is a pathway to keep families together, especially when kinship placement is available.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) There is one minor concern in the bill, but generally there is broad support for the bill.

Persons Testifying: Representative Lillian Ortiz-Self, prime sponsor; Jerry Milner and David Kelly, Family Integrity and Justice Works; Angelique Day, University of Washington School of Social Work; Shrounda Selivanoff, Children's Home Society of Washington; Katie Biron, Fostering Connections for Families; Angela Bishop, Washington Court Appointed Special Advocates Association; and Jamerika Haynes-Lewis, USA

Ambassador Pageant.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: Tara Urs, King County Department of Public Defense.