

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1945

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

Title: An act relating to improving communication between the department of children, youth, and families and caregivers.

Brief Description: Improving communication between the department of children, youth, and families and caregivers.

Sponsors: Representatives Dent, Sutherland, Wicks and Robertson.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Children, Youth & Families: 1/26/22, 1/31/22 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) to establish a caregiver communication specialist position within the DCYF for the purpose of improving communication between the DCYF and caregivers caring for children receiving child welfare services.
- Requires the DCYF to submit a report describing how to implement an automated notification system that would provide electronic or telephonic notification to caregivers of children receiving child welfare services and providing recommendations regarding improving communications between the DCYF and caregivers.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 13 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-

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.

Self, Wicks and Young.

Staff: Luke Wickham (786-7146).

Background:

Child Welfare Services.

Child welfare services refer to services, including voluntary and in-home services, out-of-home care, case management, and adoption services which strengthen, supplement, or substitute for, parental care and supervision for the purpose of preventing or remedying problems which may result in family conflict, neglect, or abuse, and providing adequate care for children away from their homes in foster homes, day care, or other child care agencies or facilities.

The investigation into whether child abuse or neglect occurred, referred to as child protective services, is not considered a child welfare service.

Caregivers caring for a child receiving child welfare services could include parents, relatives or other suitable persons, foster parents, and group homes.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) must establish a caregiver communication specialist position within the DCYF for the purpose of improving communication between the DCYF and caregivers. The caregiver communication specialist position is responsible for:

- assisting caseworkers in promptly communicating with caregivers of children receiving child welfare services;
- developing policies for sharing appropriate and timely information with such caregivers; and
- supporting coordination between existing caregiver engagement teams, constituent relations, communications specialists, and child welfare field offices.

By October 1, 2023, the DCYF must submit a report to the Legislature and the Governor describing:

- how the DCYF could implement an automated notification system that would provide electronic or telephonic notification to caregivers of children receiving child welfare services regarding upcoming changes in placement, court hearings, or other relevant information;
- any statutory, policy, or funding changes needed to accomplish this notification system; and
- recommendations regarding improving communications between the DCYF and caregivers. The DCYF shall consult with the caregiver communication specialist,

current and former caregivers, and youth who received or are receiving child welfare services regarding these recommendations.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill replaces the requirement to develop and implement a caregiver liaison program with a requirement for the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) to establish a caregiver communication specialist within the DCYF.

The substitute bill requires the caregiver communication specialist to support coordination between existing caregiver engagement teams, constituent relations, communications specialists, and child welfare field offices instead of directly communicating with caregivers when an individual caseworker is unable to promptly communicate.

The substitute bill delays the reporting requirement until October 1, 2023 (instead of 2022).

The substitute bill adds to the contents of the report required under the bill a requirement that the DCYF provide recommendations regarding improving communications between the DCYF and caregivers after consulting with the caregiver communication specialist, current and former caregivers, and youth who received or are receiving child welfare services.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 21, 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) This bill was developed with the help of numerous stakeholders. The communication that is supported in this bill can solve a lot of problems. This bill could make things better for children. There is support for improving the level of communication between the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) and caregivers. There are foster parents who have left foster parenting because of a lack of information and communication, which would be improved by this bill.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) When kinship caregivers and foster parents are caring for children, there is a lot of information and dates to track. The DCYF needs to improve communication with caregivers. There is a workload challenge for the DCYF with the number of parents and children they work with.

As drafted, the bill would require a unit focused on communication with caregivers. This would be expensive and may be confusing as this would create another group of staff within the DCYF who would be communicating with caregivers.

It may be impossible for the DCYF to share the information contemplated in the bill based on confidentiality rules.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Tom Dent, prime sponsor.

(Other) Allison Krutsinger, Department of Children, Youth, and Families.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.