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**HOUSE BILL 1278**

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**State of Washington 68th Legislature 2023 Regular Session**

**By** Representatives Ortiz-Self, Senn, Callan, Simmons, Davis, Reeves, Reed, Fey, Cortes, and Ormsby; by request of Department of Children, Youth, and Families

AN ACT Relating to supporting guardianships and voluntary placement with nonrelative kin; and amending RCW 13.36.090, 74.13.062, and 74.13.031.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

**Sec.**  RCW 13.36.090 and 2010 c 272 s 9 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) ((~~A relative guardian who is a licensed foster parent~~)) Any guardian who is a foster parent licensed pursuant to RCW 74.15.030 at the time a guardianship is established under this chapter and who has been the child's foster parent for a minimum of six consecutive months preceding entry of the guardianship order is eligible for a ((~~relative~~)) guardianship subsidy on behalf of the child. The department may establish rules setting eligibility, application, and program standards consistent with applicable federal guidelines for expenditure of state and federal funds.

(2) ((~~Within amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, a guardian who is a licensed foster parent at the time a guardianship is established under this chapter and who has been the child's foster parent for a minimum of six consecutive months preceding entry of the guardianship order is eligible for a guardianship subsidy on behalf of the child.~~)) A child is eligible for guardianship subsidies when:

(a) The child has been placed for at least six consecutive months with a guardian who has been licensed for at least six consecutive months; or

(b) The child is placed with a guardian who is already receiving a guardianship assistance subsidy for the benefit of the child's sibling.

(3) A child need not be eligible for federal foster care reimbursement in order to qualify for state-funded relative guardianship assistance payments.

(4) Nothing in this section shall be construed to create an entitlement to guardianship assistance subsidies.

**Sec.**  RCW 74.13.062 and 2022 c 127 s 4 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The department shall adopt rules consistent with federal regulations for the receipt and expenditure of state and federal funds and implement a subsidy program for eligible ((~~relatives~~)) guardians appointed by the court ((~~as a guardian~~)) under RCW 13.36.050 ((~~or as a guardian~~)), guardians of a minor appointed under RCW 11.130.215, or guardians of an Indian child who receive relative guardianship subsidies as provided in RCW 74.13.031.

(2) For the purpose of licensing a relative seeking to be appointed as a guardian and eligible for a guardianship subsidy under this section, the department shall, on a case-by-case basis, and when determined to be in the best interests of the child:

(a) Waive nonsafety licensing standards; and

(b) Apply the list of disqualifying crimes in the adoption and safe families act, unless doing so would compromise the child's safety, or would adversely affect the state's ability to continue to obtain federal funding for child welfare related functions.

(3) Relative guardianship subsidy agreements shall be designed to promote long-term permanency for the child, and may include provisions for periodic review of the subsidy amount and the needs of the child.

**Sec.**  RCW 74.13.031 and 2020 c 274 s 61 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The department shall develop, administer, supervise, and monitor a coordinated and comprehensive plan that establishes, aids, and strengthens services for the protection and care of runaway, dependent, or neglected children.

(2) Within available resources, the department shall recruit an adequate number of prospective adoptive and foster homes, both regular and specialized, i.e. homes for children of ethnic minority, including Indian homes for Indian children, sibling groups, children with disabilities or behavioral health conditions, teens, pregnant and parenting teens, and the department shall annually ((~~report~~)) provide data and information to the governor and the legislature concerning the department's success in: (a) ((~~Meeting the need for adoptive and foster home placements; (b) reducing the foster parent turnover rate; (c) completing home studies for legally free children; and (d) implementing and operating the passport program required by RCW 74.13.285. The report shall include a section entitled "Foster Home Turn-Over, Causes and Recommendations."~~)) Placing children with relatives; (b) providing supports to kinship caregivers including relative guardianship assistance payments; (c) supporting relatives to pass home studies and become licensed caregivers; and (d) meeting the need for nonrelative family foster homes when children cannot be placed with relatives.

(3) The department shall investigate complaints of any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker that results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, or sexual abuse or exploitation, or that presents an imminent risk of serious harm, and on the basis of the findings of such investigation, offer child welfare services in relation to the problem to such parents, legal custodians, or persons serving in loco parentis, and/or bring the situation to the attention of an appropriate court, or another community agency. An investigation is not required of nonaccidental injuries which are clearly not the result of a lack of care or supervision by the child's parents, legal custodians, or persons serving in loco parentis. If the investigation reveals that a crime against a child may have been committed, the department shall notify the appropriate law enforcement agency.

(4) As provided in RCW 26.44.030, the department may respond to a report of child abuse or neglect by using the family assessment response.

(5) The department shall offer, on a voluntary basis, family reconciliation services to families who are in conflict.

(6) The department shall monitor placements of children in out-of-home care and in-home dependencies to assure the safety, well-being, and quality of care being provided is within the scope of the intent of the legislature as defined in RCW 74.13.010 and 74.15.010. Under this section children in out-of-home care and in-home dependencies and their caregivers shall receive a private and individual face-to-face visit each month. The department shall randomly select no less than ten percent of the caregivers currently providing care to receive one unannounced face‑to‑face visit in the caregiver's home per year. No caregiver will receive an unannounced visit through the random selection process for two consecutive years. If the caseworker makes a good faith effort to conduct the unannounced visit to a caregiver and is unable to do so, that month's visit to that caregiver need not be unannounced. The department is encouraged to group monthly visits to caregivers by geographic area so that in the event an unannounced visit cannot be completed, the caseworker may complete other required monthly visits. The department shall use a method of random selection that does not cause a fiscal impact to the department.

The department shall conduct the monthly visits with children and caregivers to whom it is providing child welfare services.

(7) The department shall have authority to accept custody of children from parents and to accept custody of children from juvenile courts, where authorized to do so under law, to provide child welfare services including placement for adoption, to provide for the routine and necessary medical, dental, and mental health care, or necessary emergency care of the children, and to provide for the physical care of such children and make payment of maintenance costs if needed. Except where required by Public Law 95-608 (25 U.S.C. Sec. 1915), no private adoption agency which receives children for adoption from the department shall discriminate on the basis of race, creed, or color when considering applications in their placement for adoption.

(8) The department may accept custody of children from parents through a voluntary placement agreement to provide child welfare services. The department may place children with a relative, a suitable person, or a licensed foster home under a voluntary placement agreement. In seeking a placement for a voluntary placement agreement, the department should consider the preferences of the parents and attempt to place with relatives or suitable persons over licensed foster care.

(9) The department shall have authority to provide temporary shelter to children who have run away from home and who are admitted to crisis residential centers.

((~~(9)~~)) (10) The department shall have authority to purchase care for children.

((~~(10)~~)) (11) The department shall establish a children's services advisory committee which shall assist the secretary in the development of a partnership plan for utilizing resources of the public and private sectors, and advise on all matters pertaining to child welfare, licensing of child care agencies, adoption, and services related thereto. At least one member shall represent the adoption community.

((~~(11)~~)) (12)(a) The department shall provide continued extended foster care services to nonminor dependents who are:

(i) Enrolled in a secondary education program or a secondary education equivalency program;

(ii) Enrolled and participating in a postsecondary academic or postsecondary vocational education program;

(iii) Participating in a program or activity designed to promote employment or remove barriers to employment;

(iv) Engaged in employment for eighty hours or more per month; or

(v) Not able to engage in any of the activities described in (a)(i) through (iv) of this subsection due to a documented medical condition.

(b) To be eligible for extended foster care services, the nonminor dependent must have been dependent at the time that he or she reached age eighteen years. If the dependency case of the nonminor dependent was dismissed pursuant to RCW 13.34.267, he or she may receive extended foster care services pursuant to a voluntary placement agreement under RCW 74.13.336 or pursuant to an order of dependency issued by the court under RCW 13.34.268. A nonminor dependent whose dependency case was dismissed by the court may request extended foster care services before reaching age twenty-one years. Eligible nonminor dependents may unenroll and reenroll in extended foster care through a voluntary placement agreement an unlimited number of times between ages eighteen and twenty-one.

(c) The department shall develop and implement rules regarding youth eligibility requirements.

(d) The department shall make efforts to ensure that extended foster care services maximize medicaid reimbursements. This must include the department ensuring that health and mental health extended foster care providers participate in medicaid, unless the condition of the extended foster care youth requires specialty care that is not available among participating medicaid providers or there are no participating medicaid providers in the area. The department shall coordinate other services to maximize federal resources and the most cost-efficient delivery of services to extended foster care youth.

(e) The department shall allow a youth who has received extended foster care services, but lost his or her eligibility, to reenter the extended foster care program an unlimited number of times through a voluntary placement agreement when he or she meets the eligibility criteria again.

((~~(12)~~)) (13) The department shall have authority to provide adoption support benefits, or relative guardianship subsidies on behalf of youth ages eighteen to twenty-one years who achieved permanency through adoption or a relative guardianship ((~~at age sixteen or older~~)) and who meet the criteria described in subsection ((~~(11)~~)) (12) of this section.

((~~(13)~~)) (14) The department shall refer cases to the division of child support whenever state or federal funds are expended for the care and maintenance of a child, including a child with a developmental disability who is placed as a result of an action under chapter 13.34 RCW, unless the department finds that there is good cause not to pursue collection of child support against the parent or parents of the child. Cases involving individuals age eighteen through twenty shall not be referred to the division of child support unless required by federal law.

((~~(14)~~)) (15) The department shall have authority within funds appropriated for foster care services to purchase care for Indian children who are in the custody of a federally recognized Indian tribe or tribally licensed child-placing agency pursuant to parental consent, tribal court order, or state juvenile court order. The purchase of such care is exempt from the requirements of chapter 74.13B RCW and may be purchased from the federally recognized Indian tribe or tribally licensed child-placing agency, and shall be subject to the same eligibility standards and rates of support applicable to other children for whom the department purchases care.

Notwithstanding any other provision of RCW 13.32A.170 through 13.32A.200, 43.185C.295, 74.13.035, and 74.13.036, or of this section all services to be provided by the department under subsections (4), (7), and ((~~(8)~~)) (9) of this section, subject to the limitations of these subsections, may be provided by any program offering such services funded pursuant to Titles II and III of the federal juvenile justice and delinquency prevention act of 1974.

((~~(15)~~)) (16) The department may within funds appropriated for relative guardianship subsidies to provide subsidies for eligible guardians who are appointed as guardian of an Indian child by the tribal court of a federally recognized tribe located in Washington state, as defined in RCW 13.38.040. The provision of subsidies shall be subject to the same eligibility standards and rates of support applicable to other children for whom the department provides subsidies. To be eligible, the relative guardian must either be certified by a department-licensed child-placing agency or licensed by a federally recognized tribe located in Washington state that is a Title IV-E agency, as defined in 45 C.F.R. 1355.20.

(17) Within amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the department shall provide preventive services to families with children that prevent or shorten the duration of an out-of-home placement.

((~~(16)~~)) (18) The department shall have authority to provide independent living services to youths, including individuals who have attained eighteen years of age, and have not attained twenty-three years of age, who are or have been in the department's care and custody, or who are or were nonminor dependents.

((~~(17)~~)) (19) The department shall consult at least quarterly with foster parents, including members of the foster parent association of Washington state, for the purpose of receiving information and comment regarding how the department is performing the duties and meeting the obligations specified in this section and RCW 74.13.250 regarding the recruitment of foster homes, reducing foster parent turnover rates, providing effective training for foster parents, and administering a coordinated and comprehensive plan that strengthens services for the protection of children. Consultation shall occur at the regional and statewide levels.

((~~(18)~~)) (20)(a) The department shall, within current funding levels, place on its public website a document listing the duties and responsibilities the department has to a child subject to a dependency petition including, but not limited to, the following:

(i) Reasonable efforts, including the provision of services, toward reunification of the child with his or her family;

(ii) Sibling visits subject to the restrictions in RCW 13.34.136(2)(b)(ii);

(iii) Parent-child visits;

(iv) Statutory preference for placement with a relative or other suitable person, if appropriate; and

(v) Statutory preference for an out-of-home placement that allows the child to remain in the same school or school district, if practical and in the child's best interests.

(b) The document must be prepared in conjunction with a community-based organization and must be updated as needed.

((~~(19)~~)) (21)(a) The department shall have the authority to purchase legal representation for parents or kinship caregivers, or both, of children who are at risk of being dependent, or who are dependent, to establish or modify a parenting plan under RCW 13.34.155 or chapter 26.09, 26.26A, or 26.26B RCW or secure orders establishing other relevant civil legal relationships authorized by law, when it is necessary for the child's safety, permanence, or well-being. The department's purchase of legal representation for kinship caregivers must be within the department's appropriations. This subsection does not create an entitlement to legal representation purchased by the department and does not create judicial authority to order the department to purchase legal representation for a parent or kinship caregiver. Such determinations are solely within the department's discretion. The term "kinship caregiver" as used in this section means a caregiver who meets the definition of "kin" in RCW 74.13.600(1), unless the child is an Indian child as defined in RCW 13.38.040 and 25 U.S.C. Sec. 1903. For an Indian child as defined in RCW 13.38.040 and 25 U.S.C. Sec. 1903, the term "kinship caregiver" as used in this section means a caregiver who is an "extended family member" as defined in RCW 13.38.040(8).

(b) The department is encouraged to work with the office of public defense parent representation program and the office of civil legal aid to develop a cost-effective system for providing effective civil legal representation for parents and kinship caregivers if it exercises its authority under this subsection.

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