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**SENATE BILL 5256**

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

**By** Senators Saldaña, C. Wilson, Frame, Hasegawa, Hunt, Kuderer, Lovelett, Lovick, Nguyen, Nobles, Robinson, Valdez, and Wellman; by request of Department of Children, Youth, and Families

AN ACT Relating to making permanent and expanding the child welfare housing assistance program; amending RCW 74.13.802; providing an effective date; and declaring an emergency.

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

**Sec.**  RCW 74.13.802 and 2022 c 297 s 965 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) ((~~Beginning July 1, 2020~~)) Within funds appropriated for this specific purpose, the department shall ((~~establish~~)) administer a child welfare housing assistance ((~~pilot~~)) program, which provides housing vouchers, rental assistance, navigation, and other support services to eligible families.

(a) The department shall operate or contract for the operation of the child welfare housing assistance ((~~pilot~~)) program under subsection (3) of this section in one ((~~county~~)) or more counties west of the crest of the Cascade mountain range and one ((~~county~~)) or more counties east of the crest of the Cascade mountain range.

(b) The child welfare housing assistance ((~~pilot~~)) program is intended to reduce the need for foster care placement and to shorten the time that children remain in out-of-home care when placement is necessary.

(2) ((~~A parent with a child who is dependent pursuant to chapter 13.34 RCW and whose primary remaining barrier to reunification is the lack of appropriate housing is eligible for the child welfare housing assistance pilot program.~~)) The following families are eligible for assistance from the child welfare housing assistance program:

(a) A parent with a child who is dependent pursuant to chapter 13.34 RCW and a lack of appropriate housing is a remaining barrier to reunification; and

(b) A parent of a child who is a candidate for foster care as defined in RCW 26.44.020 and whose housing instability is a barrier to the child remaining in the home.

(3) The department shall contract with an outside entity or entities, who must have a demonstrated understanding of the importance of stable housing for children and families involved or at risk of being involved with the child welfare system, to operate the child welfare housing assistance ((~~pilot~~)) program. If no outside entity or entities are available to operate the program or specific parts of the program, the department may operate the program or the specific parts that are not operated by an outside entity.

(4) Families may be referred to the child welfare housing assistance ((~~pilot~~)) program by a department caseworker, an attorney, a guardian ad litem as defined in chapter 13.34 RCW, a parent ally as defined in RCW 2.70.060, an office of public defense social worker, or the court.

(5) The department shall consult with a stakeholder group that must include, but is not limited to, the following:

(a) Parent allies;

(b) Parent attorneys and social workers managed by the office of public defense parent representation program;

(c) The department of commerce;

(d) Housing experts;

(e) Community-based organizations;

(f) Advocates; and

(g) Behavioral health providers.

(6) The stakeholder group established in subsection (5) of this section shall begin meeting after July 28, 2019, and assist the department in design of the child welfare housing assistance ((~~pilot~~)) program in areas including, but not limited to:

(a) Equitable racial, geographic, ethnic, and gender distribution of program support;

(b) Eligibility criteria;

(c) Creating a definition of homeless for purposes of eligibility for the program; and

(d) Options for program design that include outside entities operating the entire program or specific parts of the program.

(7) By December 1, 2021, and biennially thereafter, the department shall report outcomes for the child welfare housing assistance ((~~pilot~~)) program to the ((~~oversight board for children, youth, and families established pursuant to RCW 43.216.015~~)) governor and the appropriate committees of the legislature. The report must include racial, geographic, ethnic, and gender distribution of program support.

((~~(8) The child welfare housing assistance pilot program established in this section is subject to the availability of funds appropriated for this purpose.~~

~~(9) This section expires June 30, 2023.~~))

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  This act is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety, or support of the state government and its existing public institutions, and takes effect June 30, 2023.

**--- END ---**