

# FINAL BILL REPORT

## 2SHB 1204

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Synopsis as Enacted

**Brief Description:** Implementing the family connections program.

**Sponsors:** House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Callan, Eslick, Leavitt, Bateman, Kloba, Reed, Simmons, Doglio, Goodman, Ortiz-Self, McEntire, Davis and Pollet; by request of Department of Children, Youth, and Families).

**House Committee on Human Services, Youth, & Early Learning**  
**House Committee on Appropriations**  
**Senate Committee on Human Services**  
**Senate Committee on Ways & Means**

**Background:**

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) contracts with Amara, a nonprofit organization, to operate the Family Connections Program (Program), which currently operates in King, Pierce, Mason, Clark, Grays Harbor, Pacific, Kitsap, and Skamania counties. The Program facilitates interaction between a parent of a child who is dependent and in out-of-home care and the person with whom the child is placed.

Families may be referred to the Program by:

- a DCYF caseworker;
- an attorney;
- a guardian ad litem;
- a parent ally;
- an Office of Public Defense social worker; or
- the court.

After receiving a referral, the Program must determine whether an in-person meeting between the parent and the individual with whom the child is placed is appropriate. If the Program determines that this meeting is appropriate, the Program then determines whether:

- the parent and the individual with whom the child is placed are willing to participate

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- in an in-person meeting; and
- safety concerns exist such that an in-person meeting should not occur.

If the Program determines that an in-person meeting should occur, the Program provides a referral to the program team. The program team includes a parent ally and an experienced caregiver.

Once the program team receives a referral, the program team must:

- ensure that the parent ally contact the parent to prepare for a meeting with the caregiver;
- ensure that the experienced caregiver contact the caregiver to prepare for a meeting with the parent;
- convene a meeting between the parent and the caregiver; and
- provide ongoing support to the parent and caregiver.

If the Program determines that an in-person meeting should not occur, the program team must facilitate the exchange of information between the parent and the caregiver in a manner that does not include an in-person meeting.

**Summary:**

The requirement that the Department of Children, Youth, and Families contract with an external organization or organizations to implement and operate the Family Connections Program (Program) is made a permanent requirement instead of one that ends June 30, 2023. The Program may operate in one or more locations on either side of the Cascade mountain range.

The process by which families may be referred to the Program is expanded to allow referral in any manner determined to be appropriate by the Program and specifically including referral by a parent or caregiver.

**Votes on Final Passage:**

House	95	0
Senate	49	0

**Effective:** June 30, 2023