

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1608

*As Reported By House Committee on:
Human Services*

Title: An act relating to children's services.

Brief Description: Improving services for children.

Sponsor(s): Representatives Leonard, Winsley, Rasmussen, Beck, Anderson, Hargrove, Brekke, Bowman, Dorn, Hine, Rust, Riley, Spanel, H. Myers, Dellwo, Phillips, Haugen, Jacobsen, Jones, R. King, Pruitt, Basich, R. Johnson, Van Luven, Holland, Valle, Paris, Belcher, Sheldon and O'Brien.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Human Services, February 28, 1991, DPS.

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
HUMAN SERVICES**

Majority Report: *That Substitute House Bill No. 1608 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.* Signed by 6 members: Representatives Leonard, Chair; Riley, Vice Chair; Anderson, Ranking Minority Member; Brekke, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; R. King; and H. Myers.

Minority Report: *Do not pass.* Signed by 4 members: Representatives Winsley, Ranking Minority Member; Tate, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Beck; and Hochstatter.

Staff: David Knutson (786-7146).

Background: Group home beds for children have declined dramatically over the past 10 years. The decline in group home beds occurred at a time of increasing child abuse and neglect and increasing alcohol and drug abuse by children. The result is children who require a structured environment provided by group homes being served in family foster care, or programs intended for runaways or children from families experiencing a family conflict which could be resolved through family counseling and short-term residential programs. Effective family conflict resolution services are not available in all communities of the state on a 24 hour basis. Consequently, children requiring group home care have not received it, children and families requiring assistance in resolving family conflicts have not received

it, and foster parents have been forced to serve children who are not appropriate for foster home care.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The Department of Social and Health Services will assess a representative sample of children in its care to determine the appropriate level of residential and treatment services needed. The department will reallocate funding from the foster care program to the group care program based on the assessment. Family reconciliation services will be available in all communities of the state on a 24 hour basis. Statutory staffing requirements for short-term residential facilities serving runaways and children from families experiencing family conflicts are removed. These short-term facilities may not be licensed to house dependent children requiring foster care or group care.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: Increased appropriations for more group home beds, additional family reconciliation services, and added staff secure residential programs for children are removed. A three phase treatment program for juvenile offenders involved with gangs or drugs is established through the Department of Social and Health Services' division of Juvenile Rehabilitation. A therapeutic family home program for up to 15 dependent children is established. Family reconciliation services will be available during evenings and weekends instead of on a 24 hour basis. The Department of Social and Health Services will recommend to the Legislature how to reallocate funds for children residential services by December, 1992; rather than reallocating funds for children's residential services by March, 1993.

Fiscal Note: Requested February 12, 1991.

Appropriation: Yes.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: The reduction in group homes for children is resulting in the inappropriate use of Crisis Residential Centers and other services for runaways and families in conflict. The Department of Social and Health Services is placing children in CRCs, who do not belong there and keeping them there longer than the law allows. Additional resources are needed to improve services to dependent children and runaways and families in conflict.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: Yvonne Chase and William Quick, Department of Social and Health Services; Margaret Casey, Children's Alliance; Charles Shelan, Community Youth Services; Tom Rembeisa and Sheila Smith, Ruth Dykeman Center; Sharon Osborne, Children's Home Society; Monica Walters, Excelsior Children's Services; Steve Walters, Toutle River Boys Ranch; Eileen Harrington, Denny Place Youth Shelter; and Peter Berliner, Children's Alliance.