

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HJM 4012

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Children & Family Services

**Brief Description:** Encouraging counties and local governments to establish a Children's Advocacy Center.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Miloscia, Delvin, Dickerson, Boldt, Chase, Moeller, Edwards, Haigh, Pettigrew, Benson, Veloria, Kagi and Schual-Berke.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Children & Family Services: 2/27/03, 3/3/03 [DP].

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Encourages counties and local governments to establish and administer Children's Advocacy Centers to improve outcomes for child victims of sexual abuse.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Darneille, Vice Chair; Boldt, Ranking Minority Member; Roach, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bailey, Dickerson, Miloscia, Pettigrew and Shabro.

**Staff:** Cynthia Forland (786-7152).

**Background:**

In 1999 legislation was enacted relating to investigations of child sexual abuse in the state. The legislation requires the design and implementation of statewide training containing consistent elements for persons engaged in the interviewing of children for child sexual abuse cases. Ongoing specialized training must be provided for persons responsible for investigating child sexual abuse.

Each agency involved in investigating child sexual abuse must document its role in handling cases and how it will coordinate with other local agencies or systems, and must adopt a local protocol based on state guidelines. Each county must develop a written

protocol for handling criminal child sexual abuse investigations. The protocol must address the coordination of child sexual abuse investigations among the prosecutor's office, law enforcement, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), local advocacy groups, and any other local agency involved in the criminal investigation of child sexual abuse.

As required by the legislation, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) convened a work group to develop state guidelines for the development of child sexual abuse investigations protocols.

In addition, the DSHS was required to establish three pilot projects involving child sexual abuse investigations. The projects were to follow written protocols and use different methods and techniques to conduct and preserve interviews with alleged child victims of sexual abuse. The DSHS was required to provide an interim report to the Legislature on the pilot projects, and the WSIPP was required to evaluate the pilot projects. Of the three pilot projects, one was conducted through a Children's Advocacy Center.

Children's Advocacy Centers offer a comprehensive approach to services for abused children and their families. These programs are designed by professionals and volunteers responding to the needs of their communities. Children's Advocacy Centers stress coordination of investigation and intervention services by bringing together professionals and agencies as a multidisciplinary team to create a child-focused approach to child abuse cases, with the goal of ensuring that children are not revictimized by the very system designed to protect them.

The National Children's Alliance is a not-for-profit organization, founded in 1987, whose mission is to provide training, technical assistance, and networking opportunities to communities seeking to plan, establish, and improve Children's Advocacy Centers.

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**Summary of Bill:**

The Senate and the House of Representatives find that the effect of child sexual abuse on victims is devastating and the subsequent investigation, prosecution, and advocacy involving child victims should be implemented in a manner so as to not further traumatize victims.

The Senate and the House of Representatives encourage counties and local governments to establish and administer Children's Advocacy Centers, which are members of the National Children's Alliance, to improve outcomes for child victims of sexual abuse.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not Requested.

**Testimony For:** The Children’s Advocacy Center (Center) model provides a holistic, comprehensive approach to child sexual abuse cases. This model is a better way to coordinate in order to help child victims. The memorial is a first step to encourage the use of this method across the state. This interdisciplinary approach creates a comfortable environment for children and a process that can be therapeutic for child victims. The approach enables collaborative decision-making concerning the appropriate way to address individual cases. Development of this approach is not dependent upon establishing a physical center. The Center approach allows for community differences, and presents the opportunity for partnerships between public and private entities. The Centers already operating in the state have realized successful outcomes. The Center approach supports victims and their families, as well as the professionals involved with these cases.

(With concerns) By encouraging counties to establish and administer Centers, this memorial will lead to the expectation that counties do so. There are currently no funds available in the counties for setting up these Centers.

**Testimony Against:** None.

**Testified:** Representative Miloscia, prime sponsor; Seth Dawson, Washington State Association of Children’s Advocacy Centers; Nancy Foll, Kids First; Lynn Grotsky, Monarch Children’s Justice & Advocacy Center; and John Tunheim, Thurston County Prosecuting Attorney’s Office.

(With concerns) Jean Wessman, Washington State Association of Counties.