

FINAL BILL REPORT

HJM 4012

Brief Description: Encouraging counties, local governments, and the department of social and health services to help facilitate the creation and operation of Children's Advocacy Centers.

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

House Committee on Children & Family Services
Senate Committee on Children & Family Services & Corrections

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 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.

Summary:

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, local governments, and the DSHS to help facilitate the creation and operation of Children's Advocacy Centers, which are members of the National Children's Alliance, and to help ensure the participation of their relevant employees in these Children's Advocacy Centers, to improve outcomes for child victims of sexual abuse.

Votes on Final Passage:

House 92 0
Senate 48 0 (Senate amended)
House 97 0 (House concurred)