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HOUSE BILL 3085

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State of Washington

58th Legislature

2004 Regular Session

By Representatives Kagi, Boldt, Dickerson, Orcutt, Shabro, Pettigrew, Darneille and Morrell

Read first time 01/27/2004. Referred to Committee on Children & Family Services.

1 AN ACT Relating to family decision meetings; adding new sections to  
2 chapter 74.13 RCW; and creating a new section.

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

4 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** (1) The legislature finds that engaging  
5 families in decision making when their children are involved in the  
6 child welfare system generally improves the outcomes for children. By  
7 involving families in the decision-making process, it is anticipated  
8 that the number of out-of-home placements can be reduced, as well as  
9 the incidence of behavioral, physical, and mental health problems for  
10 individual children. For those children in out-of-home placements, the  
11 number of placements for individual children, the likelihood of placing  
12 individual children with siblings, and successful reunifications are  
13 expected to improve as a result of family engagement. Based on the  
14 experience in the state where families have been engaged in decision  
15 making, these improved outcomes will result in cost savings to the  
16 state as fewer and less costly services and supports for children and  
17 families are needed.

18 (2) It is established as the policy of the state of Washington to

1 encourage and support meaningful family involvement in the decision  
2 making related to planning for children involved in the child welfare  
3 system.

4 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 74.13 RCW  
5 to read as follows:

6 The definitions in this section apply throughout sections 3 through  
7 5 of this act unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

8 (1) "Family decision meeting" means a family-focused intervention  
9 facilitated by dedicated professional staff that is designed to build  
10 and strengthen the natural caregiving system for the child. Family  
11 decision meetings may include family group conferences, family unity  
12 meetings, family mediation, child and family wrap-around meetings, or  
13 other professionally recognized interventions that include extended  
14 family and rely upon the family to make decisions about planning for  
15 its children. The purpose of the family decision meeting is to  
16 establish a plan that provides for the safety, attachment, and  
17 permanency needs of the child.

18 (2) "Reasonable inquiries" means efforts that involve reviewing the  
19 case file for relevant information, contacting the parents or guardians  
20 of the child, and contacting additional sources of information that may  
21 lead to ascertaining the whereabouts of family members, if necessary.

22 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** A new section is added to chapter 74.13 RCW  
23 to read as follows:

24 (1) The department of social and health services shall establish as  
25 a goal the use of family decision meetings in each case in which a  
26 child is involved in the child welfare system.

27 (2) When the department determines that the use of a family  
28 decision meeting is appropriate, an initial meeting shall be held as  
29 soon as possible following a child's involvement in the child welfare  
30 system.

31 (3) If the department elects not to conduct a family decision  
32 meeting, the reasons for that decision shall be clearly documented in  
33 the written service plan of the child developed by the department.

34 (4) The department shall develop policies and protocols identifying  
35 key decision points at which subsequent family decision meetings shall  
36 be held, such as prior to changes in a child's placement.

1        NEW SECTION.    **Sec. 4.**    A new section is added to chapter 74.13 RCW  
2 to read as follows:

3        (1) If the department of social and health services conducts a  
4 family decision meeting, the meeting shall result in the development of  
5 a written family plan that may include service recommendations,  
6 placement recommendations, and a permanency plan.

7        (2) The department shall incorporate the family plan developed at  
8 the family decision meeting into the department's service plan for the  
9 child to the extent that the family plan protects the child, builds on  
10 family strengths, and is focused on achieving permanency for the child  
11 within a reasonable time.

12        (3) If the family plan is not incorporated into the department's  
13 service plan for the child, the department shall document the reasons  
14 in the service plan.

15        NEW SECTION.    **Sec. 5.**    A new section is added to chapter 74.13 RCW  
16 to read as follows:

17        Family decision meetings shall be conducted in accordance with  
18 sections 3 and 4 of this act throughout the state by January 1, 2005.

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