
**Early Learning & Children's
Services Committee**

HB 1926

Brief Description: Revising provisions affecting the duties of the department of social and health services.

Sponsors: Representatives Dickerson, Haler, Pettigrew, Conway, Hunt, Walsh, Dunshee, Uptegrove, Chase, Blake, Williams, Appleton, Sells, Armstrong, Green, Moeller, Darneille, Simpson, Takko, Kenney, Hasegawa, Santos and Schual-Berke.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Directs the Department of Social and Health Services to meet and confer with certified representatives of licensed foster parents.
- Establishes processes for certification of representatives and certification of an exclusive representative of licensed foster parents.

Hearing Date: 2/15/07

Staff: Sydney Forrester (786-7120).

Background:

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) licenses about 6,000 foster homes statewide to provide for the care of children taken into the custody of the DSHS as a result of child abuse or neglect. Foster parents must have a regular source of income to support their families, but financial assistance is provided to help with the costs of the foster child's needs. Monthly reimbursement amounts are provided based on the child's age and needs, with reimbursement rates range between about \$375 and \$800 dollars per child.

Nine different foster parent associations are organized throughout the state. In May 2006, the Foster Parents Association of Washington State and the Washington Federation of State Employees (WFSE) announced their intent to develop a union to represent foster parents. The

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WFSE has established a foster care division and both entities have been meeting since the summer of 2006.

Summary of Bill:

The duties of the DSHS relating to child welfare services are expanded to include the duty to meet and confer with representatives of licensed foster parents. The purpose of meeting and conferring is to help ensure the department is meeting its statutory duties and obligations regarding foster parent recruitment, retention, training, and the administration of a coordinated comprehensive plan to strengthen services for protecting children. Topics of meet and confer sessions include issues of mutual concern, including but not limited to recruitment, retention, training, compensation and benefits, and recommendations for creation of a professional career track for foster parents.

The DSHS must commence discussions initially upon the certification of a representative and again in even-numbered years thereafter. Results of discussion must be committed to writing and are contingent on successful completion of necessary rule-making or statutory or budgetary actions by the Legislature. The DSHS and representatives participating in meet and confer discussions will jointly seek enactment of statutory or budgetary action.

The DSHS must recognize as a certified representative a foster parent organization with written authorization from at least ten percent of licensed foster parent households, subject to the authorization being verified by an outside neutral party mutually agreeable to the DSHS and the organization seeing to be certified as the representative.

If one or more certified representative seek to become the exclusive representative of licensed foster parents, the organization must secure a majority vote from licensed foster parents through a mail ballot election, the costs of which will be borne by all organizations listed on the ballot. The mail ballot shall provide for selection of an exclusive representative or no representation.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 14, 2007.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.