

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 6209

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As of January 18, 2008

**Title:** An act relating to multiple reports of child abuse or neglect.

**Brief Description:** Requiring notification of office of family and children's ombudsman in cases involving multiple reports of child abuse or neglect.

**Sponsors:** Senators Zarelli, Pflug, Prentice, Hargrove and Stevens.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Human Services & Corrections: 1/18/08.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

**Staff:** Jennifer Strus (786-7316)

**Background:** The Office of the Family and Children's Ombudsman (OFCO) was created in 1996 to perform a number of responsibilities including investigating complaints related to child protective services or child welfare services, monitoring the procedures used by the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) in delivering family and children's services, and providing information about the rights and responsibilities of individuals receiving family and children's services and the procedures for providing those services.

To perform these duties OFCO has the following authority: to interview children in state care; to access, inspect and copy all records, information or documents in DSHS's possession that OFCO considers necessary to conduct an investigation; and to have unrestricted on-line access to the case and management information system (CAMIS) operated by DSHS.

**Summary of Bill:** When DSHS receives the third report of alleged child abuse or neglect involving the same child, DSHS must promptly notify OFCO of the contents of the report. DSHS must also notify OFCO of its disposition of the report.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 11, 2008.

**Committee/Commission/Task Force Created:** No.

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

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: Having the Ombudsman look at cases in which there have been three referrals on a child would help to determine whether Children's is acting properly in cases in which there may be a chronicity issue. Concerned that Children's is

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missing cases in which a number of referrals may indicate a bigger problem and this bill would have a second pair of eyes reviewing what Children's does.

OTHER: The question is whether sending reports to the Ombudsman on cases in which there are three referrals is the most effective way to identify the cases of greatest concern. There were 22,000 referrals in 2007 that would have been sent to the Ombudsman if this bill had been in effect. That would be a daunting task for OFCO.

Sixty-three percent of fatalities in 2004 involved families with three or more prior abuse or neglect referrals. While OFCO agrees that there should be a method of identifying and tracking multiple referrals and acting upon those, the current language in the bill may not be the most effective way to get at the issue. Bringing in community people to review these types of cases on a regular basis may be helpful as well.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator Zarelli, prime sponsor.

OTHER: Leah Stajduhar, Department of Social and Health Services; Mary Meinig, Ombudsman, Office of Family and Children's Ombudsman; Laurie Lippold, Children's Home Society.