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**SUBSTITUTE HOUSE BILL 1728**

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**State of Washington 64th Legislature 2015 Regular Session**

**By** House Early Learning & Human Services (originally sponsored by Representatives Ormsby, Walsh, Ortiz-Self, Senn, Kagi, S. Hunt, Farrell, Dent, Zeiger, and Gregerson)

AN ACT Relating to creating the parents for parents program; adding new sections to chapter 13.04 RCW; and creating a new section.

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  Early outreach and education helps shift the attitudes of parents involved in the dependency court system from anger and resentment to acknowledgment and acceptance, enhances parents' engagement in court-ordered plans in the dependency system, and increases the likelihood of family reunification. The parents for parents program has been shown to increase the number of family reunifications, where appropriate, while decreasing the length of time needed to establish permanence. The program currently exists in nine counties: Grays Harbor/Pacific, King, Kitsap, Pierce, Snohomish, Spokane, and Thurston/Mason. It is the legislature's goal to continue to support the program in these counties, standardize the parents for parents curriculum among counties in which it is currently utilized, and replicate the program statewide by the end of the 2019–2021 biennium.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 13.04 RCW to read as follows:

For the purposes of sections 3 through 6 of this act, "child welfare parent mentor" means a parent who has successfully resolved the issues that led the parent's child into the care of the juvenile dependency court system, resulting in family reunification or another permanency outcome, and who has an interest in working collaboratively to improve the lives of children and families.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 13.04 RCW to read as follows:

(1) The goal of the parents for parents program is to increase the permanency and well-being of children in foster care through peer mentoring that increases parental engagement and contributes to family reunification.

(2) The parents for parents program may provide structured peer mentoring for families entering the dependency court system, administered by child welfare parent mentors.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 13.04 RCW to read as follows:

Subject to the availability of funds, components of the parents for parents program, provided by child welfare parent mentors, may include:

(1) Outreach and support to parents at dependency-related hearings, beginning with the shelter care hearing;

(2) A class that educates parents about the dependency system they must navigate in order to have their children returned, empowers them with tools and resources they need to be successful with their case plan, and provides information that helps them understand and support the needs of their children;

(3) Ongoing individual peer support to help parents involved with the child welfare system;

(4) Structured, curriculum-based peer support groups.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 13.04 RCW to read as follows:

(1) Subject to the availability of funds, the parents for parents program shall be funded through the office of public defense and centrally administered through a pass-through to a Washington state nonprofit-lead organization that has extensive experience supporting child welfare parent mentors.

(2) Through the contract with the lead organization, each local program must be locally administered by the county superior court or a nonprofit organization that shall serve as the host organization.

(3) Local stakeholders representing key child welfare systems shall serve as parents for parents program advisors. Examples of local stakeholders include the children's administration, the superior court, attorneys for the parents, assistant attorneys general, and court-appointed special advocates or guardians ad litem.

(4) A child welfare parent mentor lead shall provide program coordination and maintain local program information.

(5) The lead organization shall provide ongoing training to the host organizations, statewide program oversight and coordination, and maintain statewide program information.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 13.04 RCW to read as follows:

(1) Subject to the availability of funds, a research entity with experience in child welfare research shall conduct an evaluation of the parents for parents program. The evaluation design must meet the standards necessary to determine whether parents for parents can be considered a research-based program.

(2) A preliminary report to the legislature must be provided by December 1, 2016. At a minimum, the preliminary report must include statistics showing rates of attendance at court hearings and compliance with court-ordered services and visitation. The report must also address whether participation in the program affected participants' overall understanding of the dependency court process.

(3) A subsequent report must be delivered to the legislature by December 1, 2019. In addition to the information required under subsection (2) of this section, this report must include statistics demonstrating the effect of the program on reunification rates and lengths of time families were engaged in the dependency court system before achieving permanency.

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