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**SENATE BILL 5494**

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**State of Washington 66th Legislature 2019 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Zeiger, Darneille, Walsh, and Nguyen

AN ACT Relating to the baby court initiative; adding a new section to chapter 2.30 RCW; and creating a new section.

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The legislature recognizes that a critical need exists for child and family services programs to prevent the incidence of child abuse, neglect, and endangerment. These programs also need to minimize the incidence of childhood trauma on small children and provide stability to parents and children within the state. It is the intent of the legislature to create an initiative to support early interventions with parents of young children who are found to be dependent.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 2.30 RCW to read as follows:

(1) As used in this section, "baby court" means a therapeutic court as defined in this chapter that provides an intensive court process for families with a child under age three who has been found dependent pursuant to chapter 13.34 RCW. To be eligible for baby court, a parent must have a child under age three that is dependent pursuant to chapter 13.34 RCW at the time the case enters the baby court process. The case may remain in baby court after the child is age three or older if the child is still dependent pursuant to chapter 13.34 RCW. A baby court must:

(a) Establish a process for parents to voluntarily participate in baby court;

(b) Review at least every three months whether the parent or parents are actively engaged and adequately progressing toward achieving the case plan, unless the court finds good cause;

(c) Provide access to reasonably available and appropriate services designed to remedy identified parental deficiencies;

(d) Aim to reduce the length of removal of young children from parents and reunify young children with parents according to the child's best interests;

(e) Make decisions aimed to reduce incidences of abuse and neglect among young children;

(f) Make decisions aimed to reduce the long-term and short-term effects of traumatic experiences on the brain development of young children; and

(g) Promote effective interaction and the use of resources among the court and public and private child and family services providers.

(2) The family and juvenile court improvement grant program established in RCW 2.56.220 shall:

(a) Develop standards for baby courts;

(b) Develop a process where any superior court, and not just those receiving grant funds under RCW 2.56.230, may apply for grant funds from the family and juvenile court improvement grant program created in RCW 2.56.220 to establish a baby court;

(c) By January 1, 2020, distribute grant funds to support baby courts in two superior courts that serve both rural and urban populations;

(d) Develop and define the outcome measures for baby courts;

(e) Collect outcome measure data that is included in an annual report that must be submitted to fiscal committees of the legislature beginning December 1, 2021. This annual report must summarize the results of baby courts during the previous year, including data on the outcomes achieved in baby courts compared to the outcomes achieved by general dependency courts, and any cost savings associated with achieving the goals established for baby courts in subsection (1) of this section; and

(f) Sponsor and coordinate training for judicial officers and other professionals that participate in baby courts receiving grant funding pursuant to this section.

(3) The legislature intends that the grant funds in this section supplement any other funds, including existing family and juvenile court improvement grant program funds, and do not supplant these funds.

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