

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## SB 5184

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**As Passed House:**

April 5, 2021

**Title:** An act relating to establishing a building point of contact in all K-12 public schools for students in foster care.

**Brief Description:** Establishing a building point of contact in all K-12 public schools for students in foster care.

**Sponsors:** Senators Nobles, Wellman, Billig, Carlyle, Conway, Das, Dhingra, Frockt, Hasegawa, Hunt, Kuderer, Lias, Lovelett, Nguyen, Randall, Saldaña, Salomon and Wilson, C.; by request of Superintendent of Public Instruction.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Education: 3/11/21, 3/23/21 [DP].

**Floor Activity:**

Passed House: 4/5/21, 98-0.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Requires each public school to establish a contact in each elementary, middle, and high school building to coordinate services and resources for students in foster care.
- Directs existing school district foster care liaisons to train the building points of contact.
- Tasks the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction with providing best practices for choosing and training building points of contact.

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**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION**

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Santos, Chair; Dolan, Vice Chair; Ybarra, Ranking Minority Member; Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Berg, Bergquist, Callan, McCaslin, McEntire, Ortiz-Self, Rude, Steele and Stonier.

**Staff:** Megan Wargacki (786-7194).

**Background:**

Legislation enacted in 2018 directed each school district to designate a foster care liaison to facilitate district compliance with state and federal laws related to students in out-of-home care. Some of the roles and responsibilities of a foster care liaison specified in statute are collaborating with the Department of Children, Youth, and Families to address educational barriers for these students, coordinating with foster care education program staff at the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), leading and documenting the development of a process for making best interest determinations for students in out-of-home-care, and providing training to school staff on laws related to students in out-of-home care and their educational needs.

The state Juvenile Court Act in Cases Relating to Dependency of a Child and the Termination of a Parent and Child Relationship defines the following two terms. "Out-of-home care" means placement in a licensed foster family home or group care facility or placement in a home not required to be licensed. "Dependent child" means a child who has: (a) been abandoned; (b) is abused or neglected by a person legally responsible for the care of the child; (c) has no parent, guardian, or custodian capable of adequately caring for the child, such that the child is in circumstances which constitute a danger of substantial damage to the child's psychological or physical development; or (d) is receiving extended foster care services.

Legislation enacted in 2016 directed each public school to establish a point of contact in each elementary, middle, and high school to identify homeless and unaccompanied homeless youth and connect them with the school district's homeless education liaison. The OSPI must make available best practices for choosing and training building points of contact.

**Summary of Bill:**

Each public school must establish a point of contact in each elementary, middle, and high school to coordinate services and resources for students in foster care. These building points of contact must be appointed by the principal of the designated school, in consultation with the school district foster care liaison.

The district foster care liaison is responsible for training building points of contact. The OSPI must make available best practices for choosing and training building points of

contact.

References to students in out-of-home-care are changed to students who are dependent.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

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

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) Youth in foster care are the state's responsibility. These students have worse education outcomes than any other student groups in the educational system. These outcomes include attendance, grades, test scores, and graduation rates. In the wake of COVID-19, these inequities have only deepened. In addition, 63 percent of students in foster care are black, indigenous, or other people of color.

Many students in foster care rely on school as a stable environment. Some youth feel they have no adult to turn to for help. Even when there is someone at a school who is willing to help, some students are uncomfortable reaching out to them or do not know about them. When someone knows they are in foster care, it can help these students know that they are safe and supported.

School districts are already required to have one foster care liaison regardless of the number of students in foster care. The addition of this liaison has increased the ability of outside entities to partner with the school districts to meet the needs of students in foster care. Outside entities have a way to provide information, training, technical assistance, and other resources to someone whose job it is to receive these resources.

This bill is from an idea developed by youth. The bill creates a structural change by requiring one person in each school building to be designated to coordinate services and supports for students who are in foster care, and to communicate with outside entities. Principals must identify the building points of contact and ensure that they have the training and information they need to support students in foster care.

A school building point of contact for students in foster care is important for the success of these students. A point of contact looks out for these students, understands their rights, assesses their needs, and helps them to access needed resources. Transportation, particularly from other school districts, can be complicated for students in foster care, so it is helpful to have a point of contact for communication around transportation. Foster care liaisons have a close relationship with their students and help these students feel more connected to school. These points of contact will provide the resources and connections

that students in foster care need to stay in school, manage life at home, and meet their postsecondary goals.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Senator Nobles, prime sponsor; Peggy Carlson, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; Emily Stochel; Dawn Rains, Treehouse; Brianna Fenske and Samuel Martin, The Mockingbird Society; and Lori Brucher, Pacific Middle School.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.