

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1430

As Reported by House Committee On:
Human Services, Youth, & Early Learning

Title: An act relating to improving communication between the department of children, youth, and families and caregivers.

Brief Description: Improving communication between the department of children, youth, and families and caregivers.

Sponsors: Representatives Eslick and Caldier.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Human Services, Youth, & Early Learning: 1/31/23, 2/15/23 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires that the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) contract with an external organization to conduct a performance evaluation of DCYF policies, procedures, and practices related to communication between the DCYF and caregivers of children receiving child welfare services and provide recommendations.
- Requires the DCYF to submit a report to the Legislature and the Governor describing how to implement an automated notification system that would provide electronic or telephonic notification to caregivers of children receiving child welfare services.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES, YOUTH, & EARLY LEARNING

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Senn, Chair; Cortes, Vice Chair; Taylor, Vice Chair; Eslick, Ranking Minority Member; Couture, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Callan, Dent, Goodman, Ortiz-Self, Rule and Walsh.

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.

Staff: Luke Wickham (786-7146).

Background:

Child Welfare Services.

Child welfare services refer to services, including voluntary and in-home services, out-of-home care, case management, and adoption services which strengthen, supplement, or substitute for, parental care and supervision for the purpose of:

- preventing or remedying or assisting in the solution of problems which may result in families in conflict, or the neglect, abuse, exploitation, or criminal behavior of children;
- protecting and caring for dependent, abused, or neglected children;
- assisting children who are in conflict with their parents, and assisting parents who are in conflict with their children, with services designed to resolve such conflicts;
- protecting and promoting the welfare of children, including the strengthening of their own homes where possible, or, where needed; and
- providing adequate care of children away from their homes in foster family homes or day care or other child care agencies or facilities.

The investigation into whether child abuse or neglect occurred, referred to as child protective services, is not considered a child welfare service.

Caregivers caring for a child receiving child welfare services could include parents, relatives or other suitable persons, foster parents, and group homes.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) must contract with an external organization to:

- conduct a performance evaluation of DCYF policies, procedures, and practices related to communication between the DCYF and caregivers of children receiving child welfare services;
- provide recommendations regarding improving DCYF policies, procedures, and practices related to communication between the DCYF and caregivers of children receiving child welfare services; and
- consult with existing or former foster parents and a statewide organization dedicated to supporting adoptive, foster, kinship, and birth parent voices in conducting the evaluation and developing recommendations.

The DCYF must make the evaluation and recommendations from the external organization available to the public on its website.

By October 1, 2023, the DCYF must submit a report to the Legislature and the Governor

describing:

- how the DCYF could implement an automated notification system that would provide electronic or telephonic notification to caregivers of children receiving child welfare services regarding upcoming changes in placement, court hearings, or other relevant information; and
- any statutory, policy, or funding changes needed to accomplish this notification system.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill replaces the requirement in the underlying bill that the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) create a pilot program that utilizes a caregiver communication specialist with a requirement that the DCYF contract with an external organization to conduct a performance evaluation and make recommendations regarding improving DCYF policies, procedures, and practices related to communication between the DCYF and caregivers of children receiving child welfare services.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Many caregivers feel that no one is listening to them. Foster parents are so important to keep kids safe. It is important to support reunification, but when a child is in foster care, there is a need to support foster parents. Communication is vital. There have been cases where if there had been better communication with the foster parents, the DCYF may have known that it was too soon to return a child to that child's biological parents.

This bill may be a bit unusual, but it is time to do something to support caregiver communication.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Carolyn Eslick, prime sponsor.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.