

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2407

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

Title: An act relating to increasing protections for child welfare workers.

Brief Description: Increasing protections for child welfare workers.

Sponsors: Representatives Couture, Rule, Senn, Caldier and Jacobsen.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Human Services, Youth, & Early Learning: 1/23/24, 1/30/24 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Provides that a child welfare worker responding to a private location to provide services to, monitor, or investigate a family, may request to be accompanied by a trained second person when the worker has concerns that violence could occur, and requires the Department of Children, Youth, and Families to arrange for such accompaniment whenever possible.
- Requires that child welfare workers receive training related to de-escalation strategies.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES, YOUTH, & EARLY LEARNING

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Senn, Chair; Cortes, Vice Chair; Rule, Vice Chair; Eslick, Ranking Minority Member; Couture, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Callan, Dent, Goodman, Ortiz-Self, Taylor and Walsh.

Staff: Omeara Harrington (786-7136).

Background:

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.

Child Welfare Workers.

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) is responsible for administering services to assist families in the safe care of children and to protect children from child abuse and neglect. Child welfare workers are employees of the DCYF who support or provide child protective services or child welfare services.

The DCYF Child Protective Services (CPS) office conducts investigations of reported child abuse and neglect. If the CPS determines that a report is credible and meets screening criteria, it will assign either a 24-hour investigation response or 72-hour family assessment response, depending on the severity of the allegation. Services through the CPS may include, among other things, referral to services to ameliorate conditions that endanger the welfare of children, and coordination of necessary programs and services relevant to the prevention, intervention, and treatment of child abuse and neglect. Additionally, anyone, including the CPS, may file a petition in court alleging that a child should be a dependent of the state due to abuse, neglect, or because there is no parent, guardian, or custodian capable of adequately caring for the child.

Child welfare services are social services, including voluntary and in-home services, out-of-home care, case management, and adoption services, that strengthen, supplement, or substitute for, parental care and supervision. Child welfare services may be for the purpose of:

- preventing or remedying 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 parents and children who are in conflict with each other with services designed to resolve those conflicts;
- protecting and promoting the welfare of children, including the strengthening of their homes; or
- providing adequate care of children away from their homes in foster family homes or other placements.

Child Welfare Worker Training.

Child welfare workers must meet minimum training standards as established by the DCYF before they are assigned to case-carrying responsibilities as a sole worker. Newly hired child welfare workers must undergo an eight-week core training and additional in-service trainings specific to their program area. The Alliance for Professional Development, Training, and Caregiver Excellence, a collaboration between the University of Washington, the University of Washington Tacoma, and Eastern Washington University, provides the core training and ongoing training for child welfare workers. The DCYF is also required to provide specialized training to child welfare workers who are responsible for investigating child sexual abuse and conducting interviews of children, as well as ongoing training and consultation on handling cases that involve domestic violence.

Summary of Bill:

A child welfare worker who is required to respond to a private home or other private location to provide services to, monitor, or investigate a family, may make a request to their supervisor to be accompanied by a second trained individual when the child welfare worker has concerns that violence could occur based on a family member's history of violence. When a request is made, the DCYF must provide a second trained individual to accompany the child welfare worker unless it is not possible to fulfill the request under the circumstances. The second trained individual may be a law enforcement officer, a mental health professional, or another first responder, such as a firefighter or emergency medical personnel, or an employee of the DCYF who is trained as a child welfare worker and acts in a supervisory capacity with respect to other child welfare workers.

Minimum training standards for child welfare workers must include training related to de-escalation strategies. The DCYF must also offer optional in-service training on de-escalation strategies on at least an annual basis to all child welfare workers.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Preliminary 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) There have been 38 assaults on child welfare workers recently. Currently, there is an expectation to work alone and there is little to no support after something happens. Reported assaults have involved knives to the throat, being dragged across the floor, and hit in the face. One person had an axe put to their chest. These incidents leave long-term physical and emotional damage. The work that these state workers do is valuable, and it is important to take measures to keep them safe. There are a lot of new child welfare workers. This bill offers an additional layer of security, allowing them to not be alone when they go to someone's door, and also to have de-escalation training to be more prepared in dangerous situations.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) One child welfare worker has experienced being threatened, pushed, head-butted by a child, bitten by a dog, and many incidents of a client, parent, or child using their language, body, or weapons as a means of intimidation. This person was nearly killed in a hotel room when a youth escalated, kicked, and slapped the child welfare worker and tried to throw her out a window. This has led to continued physical and psychological damage. There should

be mandatory criminal charges in these cases, like those that apply to transit workers, nurses, doctors, lawyers, and judges. A criminal sanction would serve as a deterrent. The de-escalation training offered in the bill is wonderful, but clearly not enough. Law enforcement and other first responders will not be willing to accompany a child welfare worker on a time-consuming visit, so this will fall to supervisors who will not be able to get their own jobs done.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Travis Couture, prime sponsor; and Kati Durkin, Washington Federation of State Employees.

(Other) Heidi Worlton; Deidra Van Every; and Katrina Justis.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.