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**SENATE BILL 5169**

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**State of Washington 69th Legislature 2025 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Nobles and Dhingra

AN ACT Relating to testimony of children; and amending RCW 9A.44.120 and 9A.44.150.

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

**Sec.**  RCW 9A.44.120 and 2024 c 298 s 17 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) A statement not otherwise admissible by statute or court rule, is admissible in evidence in dependency proceedings under Title 13 RCW and criminal proceedings, including juvenile offense adjudications, in the courts of the state of Washington if:

(a)((~~(i)~~)) It is made by a child when under the age of ((~~ten describing any act of sexual contact performed with or on the child by another, describing any attempted act of sexual contact with or on the child by another, or describing any act of physical abuse of the child by another that results in substantial bodily harm as defined by RCW 9A.04.110; or~~

~~(ii) It is made by a child when under the age of 18 describing any of the following acts or attempted acts performed with or on the child: Trafficking under RCW 9A.40.100; commercial sexual abuse of a minor under RCW 9.68A.100; promoting commercial sexual abuse of a minor under RCW 9.68A.101; or promoting travel for commercial sexual abuse of a minor under RCW 9.68A.102~~)) 18 and:

(i) Describes an act or attempted act of sexual contact performed with or on the child witness by another person or with or on a child other than the child witness by another person;

(ii) Describes an act or attempted act of physical abuse against the child witness by another person or against a child other than the child witness by another person;

(iii) Describes a violation or attempted violation of RCW 9A.40.100 (trafficking) or any offense identified in chapter 9.68A RCW (sexual exploitation of children); or

(iv) Describes a violent offense or an attempted violent offense committed against a person known by or familiar to the child witness or by a person known by or familiar to the child witness. For purposes of this subsection (1)(a)(iv), "violent offense" has the same meaning as defined in RCW 9.94A.030;

(b) The court finds, in a hearing conducted outside the presence of the jury, that the time, content, and circumstances of the statement provide sufficient indicia of reliability; and

(c) The child either:

(i) Testifies at the proceedings; or

(ii) Is unavailable as a witness, except that when the child is unavailable as a witness, such statement may be admitted only if there is corroborative evidence of the act.

(2) A statement may not be admitted under this section unless the proponent of the statement makes known to the adverse party his or her intention to offer the statement and the particulars of the statement sufficiently in advance of the proceedings to provide the adverse party with a fair opportunity to prepare to meet the statement.

**Sec.**  RCW 9A.44.150 and 2024 c 298 s 18 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) On motion of the prosecuting attorney in a criminal proceeding, the court may order that a child under the age of 18 may testify in a room outside the presence of the defendant and the jury while one-way closed-circuit television equipment simultaneously projects the child's testimony into another room so the defendant and the jury can watch and hear the child testify if:

(a) The testimony will:

(i) Describe an act or attempted act of sexual contact performed with or on the child witness by another person or with or on a child other than the child witness by another person;

(ii) Describe an act or attempted act of physical abuse against the child witness by another person or against a child other than the child witness by another person;

(iii) Describe a violation or attempted violation of RCW 9A.40.100 (trafficking) or any offense identified in chapter 9.68A RCW (sexual exploitation of children); or

(iv) Describe a violent offense ((~~as defined by RCW 9.94A.030~~)) or an attempted violent offense committed against a person known by or familiar to the child witness or by a person known by or familiar to the child witness. For purposes of this subsection (1)(a)(iv), "violent offense" has the same meaning as defined in RCW 9.94A.030;

(b) The testimony is taken during the criminal proceeding;

(c) The court finds by substantial evidence, in a hearing conducted outside the presence of the jury, that:

(i) The particular child involved would be traumatized;

(ii) The source of the trauma is not the courtroom generally, but the presence of the defendant; and

(iii) The emotional or mental distress suffered by the child would be more than de minimis, such that the child could not reasonably communicate at the trial. If the defendant is excluded from the presence of the child, the jury must also be excluded;

(d) As provided in (a) and (b) of this subsection, the court may allow a child witness to testify in the presence of the defendant but outside the presence of the jury, via closed-circuit television, if the court finds, upon motion and hearing outside the presence of the jury, that: (i) The particular child involved would be traumatized; (ii) the source of the trauma is not the courtroom generally, but the presence of the jury; and (iii) the emotional or mental distress suffered by the child would be more than de minimis, regardless of whether or not the child could reasonably communicate at the trial in front of the jury. If the child is able to communicate in front of the defendant but not the jury the defendant will remain in the room with the child while the jury is excluded from the room;

(e) The court finds that the prosecutor has made all reasonable efforts to prepare the child witness for testifying, including informing the child or the child's parent or guardian about community counseling services, giving court tours, and explaining the trial process. If the prosecutor fails to demonstrate that preparations were implemented or the prosecutor in good faith attempted to implement them, the court shall deny the motion;

(f) The court balances the strength of the state's case without the testimony of the child witness against the defendant's constitutional rights and the degree of infringement of the closed-circuit television procedure on those rights;

(g) The court finds that no less restrictive method of obtaining the testimony exists that can adequately protect the child witness from suffering emotional or mental distress that would be more than de minimis;

(h) When the court allows the child witness to testify outside the presence of the defendant, the defendant can communicate constantly with the defense attorney by electronic transmission and be granted reasonable court recesses during the child's testimony for person-to-person consultation with the defense attorney;

(i) The court can communicate with the attorneys by an audio system so that the court can rule on objections and otherwise control the proceedings;

(j) All parties in the room with the child witness are on camera and can be viewed by all other parties. If viewing all participants is not possible, the court shall describe for the viewers the location of the prosecutor, defense attorney, and other participants in relation to the child;

(k) The court finds that the television equipment is capable of making an accurate reproduction and the operator of the equipment is competent to operate the equipment; and

(l) The court imposes reasonable guidelines upon the parties for conducting the filming to avoid trauma to the child witness or abuse of the procedure for tactical advantage.

The prosecutor, defense attorney, and a neutral and trained victim's advocate, if any, shall always be in the room where the child witness is testifying. The court in the court's discretion depending on the circumstances and whether the jury or defendant or both are excluded from the room where the child is testifying, may remain or may not remain in the room with the child.

(2) During the hearing conducted under subsection (1) of this section to determine whether the child witness may testify outside the presence of the defendant and/or the jury, the court may conduct the observation and examination of the child outside the presence of the defendant if:

(a) The prosecutor alleges and the court concurs that the child witness will be unable to testify in front of the defendant or that (i) the particular child involved would be traumatized; (ii) the source of the trauma is not the courtroom generally, but the presence of the defendant; and (iii) the emotional or mental distress suffered by the child would be more than de minimis;

(b) The defendant can observe and hear the child witness by closed-circuit television;

(c) The defendant can communicate constantly with the defense attorney during the examination of the child witness by electronic transmission and be granted reasonable court recesses during the child's examination for person-to-person consultation with the defense attorney; and

(d) The court finds the closed-circuit television is capable of making an accurate reproduction and the operator of the equipment is competent to operate the equipment. Whenever possible, all the parties in the room with the child witness shall be on camera so that the viewers can see all the parties. If viewing all participants is not possible, then the court shall describe for the viewers the location of the prosecutor, defense attorney, and other participants in relation to the child.

(3) The court shall make particularized findings on the record articulating the factors upon which the court based its decision to allow the child witness to testify via closed-circuit television pursuant to this section. The factors the court may consider include, but are not limited to, a consideration of the child's age, physical health, emotional stability, expressions by the child of fear of testifying in open court or in front of the defendant, the relationship of the defendant to the child, and the court's observations of the child's inability to reasonably communicate in front of the defendant or in open court. The court's findings shall identify the impact the factors have upon the child's ability to testify in front of the jury or the defendant or both and the specific nature of the emotional or mental trauma the child would suffer. The court shall determine whether the source of the trauma is the presence of the defendant, the jury, or both, and shall limit the use of the closed-circuit television accordingly.

(4) This section does not apply if the defendant is an attorney pro se unless the defendant has a court-appointed attorney assisting the defendant in the defense.

(5) This section may not preclude the presence of both the child witness and the defendant in the courtroom together for purposes of establishing or challenging the identification of the defendant when identification is a legitimate issue in the proceeding.

(6) The Washington supreme court may adopt rules of procedure regarding closed-circuit television procedures.

(7) All recorded tapes of testimony produced by closed-circuit television equipment shall be subject to any protective order of the court for the purpose of protecting the privacy of the child witness.

(8) Nothing in this section creates a right of the child witness to a closed-circuit television procedure in lieu of testifying in open court.

(9) The state shall bear the costs of the closed-circuit television procedure.

(10) A child witness may or may not be a victim in the proceeding.

(11) Nothing in this section precludes the court, under other circumstances arising under subsection (1)(a) of this section, from allowing a child to testify outside the presence of the defendant and the jury so long as the testimony is presented in accordance with the standards and procedures required in this section.

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