

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 5032

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

Title: An act relating to expanding the duties of the office of the family and children's ombuds to include juvenile rehabilitation facilities operated by the department of children, youth, and families.

Brief Description: Expanding the duties of the office of the family and children's ombuds to include juvenile rehabilitation facilities operated by the department of children, youth, and families.

Sponsors: Senators Wilson, C., Frame, Hasegawa, Nobles, Trudeau and Wellman.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Early Learning & Human Services: 3/25/25, 3/26/25 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Expands the scope of the existing duties provided to the Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds to include any person in juvenile rehabilitation facilities.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & HUMAN SERVICES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Bergquist, Chair; Cortes, Vice Chair; Eslick, Ranking Minority Member; Burnett, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bernbaum, Dent, Goodman, Hill, Ortiz-Self, Penner and Taylor.

Staff: Luke Wickham (786-7146).

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.

The Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds.

The Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds (OFCO) was created for the purpose of promoting public awareness and understanding of family and children's services, identifying system issues and responses for the Governor and the Legislature to act upon, and monitoring and ensuring compliance with administrative acts, relevant statutes, rules, and policies pertaining to family and children's services and the placement, supervision, and treatment of children in the state's care or in state-licensed facilities or residences. The ombuds reports directly to the Governor.

The ombuds has the following duties:

- providing information on the rights and responsibilities of people receiving family and children's services, juvenile justice, juvenile rehabilitation, and child early learning, and on the procedures for providing these services;
- investigating administrative acts alleged to be contrary to law, rule, or policy;
- monitoring the procedures of the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF);
- reviewing periodically the facilities and procedures of state institutions serving children, youth, and families, and state-licensed facilities or residences;
- recommending changes in the procedures for addressing the needs of children, youth, and families;
- submitting an annual report with recommendations; and
- granting the Oversight Board for Children, Youth, and Families access to all relevant records unless prohibited by law.

The DCYF must:

- allow the OFCO to communicate privately with any child in the custody of the DCYF, or any child who is part of a near fatality investigation by the DCYF for the purposes of carrying out its duties;
- permit the OFCO physical access to state institutions serving children, and state licensed facilities or residences for the purposes of carrying out its duties;
- grant the OFCO the right to access, inspect, and copy all relevant information, records, or documents in the possession or control of the DCYF that the OFCO considers necessary in an investigation; and
- grant the OFCO unrestricted online access to the child welfare case management system, and the DCYF data information system for the purpose of carrying out its duties.

Juvenile Rehabilitation Institutions.

There are two juvenile rehabilitation institutions, which are operated by the DCYF. These institutions include: (1) Green Hill School in Chehalis, which serves males ages 17 through 25; and (2) Echo Glen Children's Center in Snoqualmie which serves females ages 12 through 25 and males ages 11 through 17.

Summary of Bill:

The scope of the existing duties provided to the Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds (OFCO) regarding the provision of information on the rights and responsibilities of certain people, investigation of complaints, monitoring procedures, reviewing facilities, recommending changes to procedures, submitting an annual report, and granting records access to the Oversight Board for Children, Youth, and Families are expanded to include any person in the state's care or in state-licensed facilities or residences and juvenile rehabilitation facilities who is receiving services from the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF).

The duties of the OFCO to provide information to people, investigate administrative acts, monitor procedures, review facilities, and recommend changes in procedures are modified to specify that these duties relate to people receiving services from the DCYF and the procedures and actions of the DCYF.

The DCYF must permit the OFCO to have physical access to juvenile rehabilitation facilities and grant OFCO access to the juvenile rehabilitation case management system.

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) None.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) This bill clarifies that the Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds (OFCO) will respond to concerns related to juvenile rehabilitation facilities. Over the past year, the OFCO has received several complaints related to Green Hill School. These complaints involve issues such as overcrowding, unsanitary living conditions, lack of access to programming, units being on lockdown, the availability of illegal drugs, and general safety concerns for the residents at Green Hill.

Current law does not clearly authorize the OFCO to include individuals placed in juvenile rehabilitation facilities within its scope of work. This bill clarifies that authority by specifying that the OFCO has the authority to investigate complaints about youth and young adults in juvenile rehabilitation facilities, that the OFCO has access to those facilities, that

the OFCO can meet with youth and young adults in those facilities, and that the OFCO can access the case management records operated by the agency.

There is an anticipated need for two additional full-time employees to cover this expanded authority.

Persons Testifying: Patrick Dowd, WA State Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.