
Early Learning & Human Services Committee

SB 5977

Brief Description: Requiring publication of child near fatality reviews.

Sponsors: Senators Torres, Dozier, Gildon, Warnick and Wilson, J..

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Department of Children, Youth, and Families to issue a report on the results of any child near fatality review that is conducted within 180 days of the conclusion of that report, unless an extension has been granted by the Governor.

Hearing Date: 2/18/26

Staff: Luke Wickham (786-7146).

Background:

Child Fatality Reviews.

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) is required to conduct a child fatality review in the event of a fatality suspected to be caused by child abuse or neglect of any minor who is in the care of the DCYF or receiving child welfare services or who has been in the care of the DCYF or received child welfare services within one year preceding the minor's death. The DCYF must consult with the Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds (Ombuds) to determine if a child fatality should be conducted in any case where it cannot be determined whether the death is the result of suspected child abuse or neglect. The DCYF must ensure that the fatality review team consists of people who had no previous involvement in the case.

Upon the conclusion of a child fatality review, the DCYF must issue a report on the results of the

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.

review within 180 days following the fatality, unless the Governor grants an extension. These reports must be distributed to the Legislature, and the DCYF must post these on their website. Any confidential information may be redacted from these reports by the DCYF.

Near Fatality Reviews.

In the event of a near fatality of a child who is in the care of or receiving child welfare services from the DCYF or who has been in the care of the DCYF or received child welfare services within the one year preceding the near fatality, the DCYF must promptly notify the Ombuds. Near fatality is defined as an act that, as certified by a physician, places the child in serious or critical condition. The DCYF has the authority to conduct discretionary near fatality reviews and may conduct near fatality reviews at the request of the Ombuds.

In the event of a near fatality of a child who is in the care of or receiving child welfare services from the DCYF within three months preceding the near fatality, or who was the subject of an investigation by the DCYF for possible child abuse or neglect, the DCYF must promptly notify the Ombuds and the department must conduct a near fatality review.

The Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds.

The Washington State Family and Children's Ombuds (Ombuds) is an independent office within the Office of the Governor that helps people navigate Washington agencies serving children, youth, and families. The Ombuds also investigates complaints about state agency actions or conduct that involve:

- a child at risk of abuse, neglect, or other harm;
- a child or parent involved with child protection or child welfare services;
- the safety or welfare of children in state care; and
- an individual residing in a juvenile rehabilitation facility.

When a complaint is substantiated, the Ombuds will make recommendations to a state agency to correct a violation of law or policy, or to prevent harm to a child or family. In addition, the Ombuds must identify system-wide issues and recommend appropriate changes to improve outcomes for children and strengthen families.

Summary of Bill:

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) must issue a report on the results of any child near fatality review that is conducted within 180 days of the conclusion of that report, unless an extension has been granted by the Governor. These reports must be distributed to the Legislature and included on the DCYF public website. These near fatality review reports are subject to public disclosure, but confidential information may be redacted from the reports.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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