

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 1177

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Human Services, March 25, 2025
Ways & Means, April 8, 2025

Title: An act relating to the child welfare housing assistance program.

Brief Description: Concerning the child welfare housing assistance program.

Sponsors: House Committee on Early Learning & Human Services (originally sponsored by Representatives Ortiz-Self, Callan, Alvarado, Macri and Simmons).

Brief History: Passed House: 3/3/25, 62-35.

Committee Activity: Human Services: 3/25/25 [DP-WM, DNP, w/oRec].
Ways & Means: 4/04/25, 4/08/25 [DP, DNP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Allows the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF), or entities contracted with DCYF to operate the Child Welfare Housing Assistance Program (Program), to provide housing assistance through the Program after DCYF is no longer providing child welfare or child protective services to the family.
- Directs DCYF to serve families eligible for the Program who are placed on a waiting list of any kind in an attempt to serve all families eligible for the program and eliminate any waiting lists, subject to appropriation.
- Adds additional reporting requirements to DCYF's annual report the Legislature.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

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.

Signed by Senators Wilson, C., Chair; Frame, Vice Chair; Orwall.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senator Christian, Ranking Member.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senator Warnick.

Staff: Alison Mendiola (786-7488)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Robinson, Chair; Stanford, Vice Chair, Operating; Trudeau, Vice Chair, Capital; Frame, Vice Chair, Finance; Dozier, Assistant Ranking Member, Capital; Cleveland, Conway, Dhingra, Hansen, Hasegawa, Kauffman, Pedersen, Riccelli, Saldaña, Wellman and Wilson, C..

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senators Gildon, Ranking Member, Operating; Torres, Assistant Ranking Member, Operating; Schoesler, Ranking Member, Capital; Boehnke, Braun, Muzzall, Wagoner and Warnick.

Staff: Josh Hinman (786-7281)

Background: Child Welfare Housing Assistance Program. The purpose of the Child Welfare Housing Assistance Program (Program) is to reduce the need for foster care placement and to shorten the time children remain in out-of-home care when placement is necessary by provide housing vouchers, rental assistance, navigation, and other support services to eligible families. The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) administers the Program, in one or more counties in Eastern and Western Washington, within funds appropriated for this specific purpose. The Program was initially created as a pilot program in 2019 and made permanent in 2023.

Eligibility. The following families are eligible for assistance from the Program:

- a parent with a child who is dependent and a lack of appropriate housing is a remaining barrier to reunification; and
- a parent of a child who is a candidate for foster care and whose housing instability is a barrier to the child remaining in the home.

DCYF contracts with an outside entity or entities who must have a demonstrated understanding of the importance of stable housing for children and families involved, or at risk of being involved, with the child welfare system, to operate the Program.

Annually beginning November 1, 2024, DCYF shall report to the Legislature, at a minimum, when available, the distribution of the Program by race, geography, ethnicity, and gender including a discussion of whether of this distribution is equitable and include any recommendations for legislative changes to the Program.

Summary of Bill: DYCF, or entities contracted with DCYF to operate the Program, may continue to provide housing assistance through the Program after DCYF is no longer providing child welfare or child protective services to the family. DCYF is to adopt rules to establish formal procedures for implementation of the Program.

Subject to appropriation, DCYF shall serve families eligible for the Program who are placed on a waiting list of any kind in an attempt to serve all eligible families and eliminate any waiting list, subject to appropriation.

DCYF's annual report to the Legislature is to include the following additional information:

- the number of unhoused parents on the waiting list for vouchers supported by the Program and the average time spent on the waiting list;
- the percentage of funding spent on housing assistance for families to prevent out-of-home placement, support reunification, provide for Program administration, or other purposes; and
- the percentage of funding spent on Program administration, rental assistance to families, and supportive services necessary to receive federal housing voucher support.

Appropriation: The bill contains a section or sections to limit implementation to the availability of amounts appropriated for that specific purpose.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Human Services): No public hearing was held.

Persons Testifying (Human Services): N/A

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Human Services): N/A

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Ways & Means): PRO: For families involved in child welfare, a lack of housing can lead to reunification delays or contribute to the risk of families being separated. The child welfare housing assistance program is an innovative solution, which started as a pilot in 2019 and has become permanent. The program has successfully housed hundreds of families. There is a waitlist. Not only is this investment

the right thing for families, but it is cost effective in two ways. First, the program allows the state to leverage federal housing vouchers, which allows for the cost of rent to be covered with federal funding. Second, the program helps avoid prolonged stays in foster care, which is at least four times more expensive than the cost to house families through this program. Testifier has personally experienced homelessness as a direct result of child welfare involvement. Testifier completed all required services after one-and-a-half years into her case, yet housing had become the final barrier. She and her children remained separated for an additional six months simply due to the lack of stable housing. As a parent professional, she continued to work with parents facing these same challenges 20 years later. Families are still struggling to find housing and enduring unnecessary delays to reunification. Change requires stability, and stability starts and ends with housing. House Bill 1177 will strengthen families and saves the the state money and costly out of home care.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Kim Justice, Partners for Our Children; Terreca DeFehr.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Ways & Means): No one.