

Weekly Legislative Update: **Children's Services**

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SB 5256 Making permanent and expanding the child welfare housing assistance program and **SB 5124 Supporting guardianships and voluntary placement with non-relative kin** have both passed the legislature. **SB 5280 Concerning the duty of clergy to report child abuse or neglect** has generated quite a bit of controversy regarding an amendment that removes the penitent privilege. The Senate bill does not have the amendment. The House version does. Reconciliation of the two versions is the next step.

Bills Needing Action This Week

Please read Bills We Support to see the latest status of other bills.

No action is needed this week.

Bills We Support

HB 1186/SB 5256 Making permanent and expanding the child welfare housing assistance program. This bill makes permanent a pilot program which provides housing vouchers, rental assistance, navigation and other support services to a parent of a child in out-of-home care in which a lack of appropriate housing is a remaining barrier to reunification or where housing instability is a barrier to remaining in the home. It expands the pilot to one or more counties both east and west of the Cascades. The bill is intended to reduce the need for foster care placement and shorten out of home care when placement is necessary.

Current status: SB 5256 is awaiting signatures from the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House. HB 1186 is dead.

HB 1405/SB 5397 Preserving public benefit payments to people in the care of the department of children, youth, and families. DCYF can no longer apply a child's benefit payments to reimbursement of that child's care. When a child comes into care, DCYF must 1) assess whether a child is eligible for benefits (10-12% of foster youth receive disability, survivor, or veterans' benefits while closer to 20% are eligible) and 2) develop and implement a financial literacy program for benefit recipients.

Current status: HB 1405 did not make it out of the executive committee. We will probably see it next year. SB 5397 is dead.

SB 5230 Concerning Extended Foster Care: Increases scope of present program. Creates a Post extended Foster Care Program in the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) to support youth and young adults ages 21 through 25 who were in out-of-home care on their 18th birthday. Directs DCYF to make a number of changes to the Extended Foster Care Program, including changing the eligibility requirements so that a youth no longer has to meet federal eligibility requirements to be eligible for extended foster care.

Current status: SB 5230 is dead.

HB 1278/SB 5124 Supporting guardianships and voluntary placement with non-relative kin. Eligibility for guardianship subsidies is expanded to include any guardian who is a licensed foster parent, instead of just relatives licensed as foster parents. The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) is authorized to provide subsidies for eligible guardians who are appointed as guardians of an Indian child by a tribal court.

Current status: SB 5124 has been signed by both the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House. Its next step is to go to the Governor's desk. HB 1278 is dead.

HB 1098/SB 5280 Concerning the duty of clergy to report child abuse or neglect. The bill defines "member of the clergy" and includes them as mandatory reporters of child abuse or neglect if there is reasonable cause to believe that a child has suffered abuse or neglect. SB 5280 has an exemption from the mandatory reporting of child abuse and neglect for information that a member of the clergy obtains through a confession. Substitute HB 1098 removes that exemption.

Current status: SB 5280 was passed out of the House after much debate regarding the penitent privilege. Due to the addition of the amendment removing the penitent privilege in the House bill, SB5280 will go back to the Senate for reconciliation. HB 1098 is dead.

How You Can Be Involved

- Demands on the budget will be great this year. Advocacy will be crucial in securing the funding needed to support the State's population of at-risk children.
- Please follow the weekly legislative newsletter and any action alerts.
- Contacting legislators as an individual can be impactful.
- If you are interested in researching and following a particular issue, please contact Janet Hedgepath at jhedgepath@lwvwa.org.