

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1509

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

Title: An act relating to family reconciliation services.

Brief Description: Concerning family reconciliation services.

Sponsors: Representatives Taylor, Dent, Davis, Reed and Hill.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Early Learning & Human Services: 2/11/25, 2/18/25 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF), subject to available funding, to offer contracts to provide community-based family reconciliation services in at least three regions served by the DCYF by January 1, 2026, and offer these contracts statewide by January 1, 2030.
- Expands the circumstances in which the DCYF or a designated contractor must, subject to available funding, provide family reconciliation services to a family or youth to include circumstances where the youth is: (1) in a county juvenile detention center and family conflict exists; and (2) identified through the housing stability for youth in crisis program.
- Expands the information that must be included in the annual report required by the DCYF regarding family reconciliation services.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & HUMAN SERVICES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Bergquist, Chair;

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.

Cortes, Vice Chair; Bernbaum, Dent, Goodman, Hill, Ortiz-Self and Taylor.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Eslick, Ranking Minority Member; Penner.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Burnett, Assistant Ranking Minority Member.

Staff: Luke Wickham (786-7146).

Background:

Family Reconciliation Services.

Family Reconciliation Services (FRS) is a voluntary program serving families and youth who are experiencing conflict and may be in need of services and when a child in the family is away from their lawfully prescribed residence.

The services offered by FRS are provided by culturally relevant, trauma-informed, community-based entities under contract with the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) or directly by the DCYF, and are designed to assess and stabilize the family with the goal of resolving crises and building supports, skills, and connection to community networks and resources.

These services may include:

- referrals for services for suicide prevention, psychiatric or other medical care, behavioral health treatment, legal assistance, or educational assistance;
- parent training;
- conflict management or dispute resolution; or
- other services.

The goal of FRS is to return the family to a pre-crisis state and work with the family to identify alternative methods of handling conflict. The services offered by FRS are not intended to provide long-term services or to place the youth outside of the home.

Department of Children, Youth, and Families Regions.

The DCYF organizes itself into six regions. Region 1 includes Northeastern Washington. Region 2 includes Southeast Washington. Region 3 includes Snohomish, Skagit, Whatcom, and San Juan Counties. Region 4 includes King County. Region 5 includes Pierce and Kitsap Counties. Region 6 includes Southwest Washington and the Olympic Peninsula.

Summary of Bill:

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) must, subject to available

funding, offer contracts to provide community-based family reconciliation services in at least three regions served by the DCYF by January 1, 2026, and offer these contracts statewide by January 1, 2030.

Community-based family reconciliation services are defined to mean family reconciliation services that are provided by a community-based entity under contract with the DCYF.

The circumstances in which the DCYF or a designated contractor must, subject to available funding, provide family reconciliation services to a family or youth are expanded to include where the youth is:

- in a county juvenile detention center and family conflict exists; and
- identified through the housing stability for youth in crisis program.

The information included in the annual report required by the DCYF regarding FRS is expanded to include:

- the number of requests for community-based reconciliation services; and
- the number of referrals made to community-based family reconciliation services.

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) There are some circumstances where families are in a terrible situation and Family Reconciliation Services (FRS) can help support a family and help that family identify strategies for handling that conflict.

It is important to help support families and allow children to return into their families and it is important to have the appropriate resources to make this happen.

In its current form, FRS is not properly serving families, particularly families of color. In order to obtain services, families have to contact the very agency that investigates child abuse and neglect. In fact, families need to call the same phone line that is used for reporting child abuse and neglect.

Family reconciliation services should be provided by community-based entities.

The FRS system is connected to going to court to access certain court services like child in need of services petitions.

The interaction with the state department that deals with possible removal of children is scary for families.

For too long families have struggled with being able to have services that truly meet their needs. There was a co-design effort to redesign FRS with community involvement. The result of this is an FRS model for community, by community.

The state has reduced youth homelessness by 40 percent. There is an evaluation funded through the Raikes Foundation of community-based FRS, which allows for a true public-private partnership. This proposal has the potential of reducing youth homelessness.

There is a community-based FRS model that is succeeding in Everett.

Family Reconciliation Services should be better utilized. If FRS had been provided to more families they would have been better served and allowed to remain together. Family separation often has negative impacts on families and young people.

(Opposed) There is opposition to the portion of the bill that moves the delivery of services out of the state agency and into the community. There is no commitment from the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) that individuals at that agency would keep their job if these services were moved to community-based providers.

There is no plan for the DCYF to maintain the employment of state employees when implementing this bill.

The DCYF employees who provide FRS services love the work that they do. These state employees want to continue providing these services.

Moving these services to private agencies will result in higher costs with less accountability. Private agencies will be able to say no to providing services.

There are circumstances where families with acute issues are able to receive needed services without the filing of a dependency through the current FRS process. Efforts and money should be spent to make sure that the DCYF is fully staffed. This program works, but is hampered by the current workload of the DCYF staff.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Jamila Taylor, prime sponsor; Jim Theofelis, NorthStar Advocates; Casey Trupin, Raikes Foundation; Kim Justice, Partners for Our Children; Angela Cruze, Lived Expert; Karen Pillar, TeamChild; and Samuel Martin, Washington Coalition for Homeless Youth Advocacy.

(Opposed) Kati Durkin, Washington Federation of State Employees; and Josh Eaton, WFSE Member.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.