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**HOUSE BILL 2525**

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**State of Washington**

**66th Legislature**

**2020 Regular Session**

**By** Representatives Callan, Corry, Eslick, Springer, Orwall, Ortiz-Self, Shewmake, Goodman, Senn, Caldier, and Dent

1 AN ACT Relating to establishing the family connections program;  
2 amending RCW 2.70.060, 2.70.070, 2.70.080, 2.70.090, and 74.13.802;  
3 adding a new section to chapter 74.13 RCW; creating a new section;  
4 and providing an expiration date.

5 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

6 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** (1) The legislature recognizes that the  
7 department of children, youth, and families is working to change the  
8 culture of foster care and transition to a prevention-based child  
9 welfare system. The family first prevention services act will help  
10 facilitate this transition by allowing states to use federal funds  
11 for preventative services.

12 (2) To successfully prevent future child abuse and neglect from  
13 occurring, and minimize the impact of removal, the department should  
14 help facilitate relationships between foster families and birth  
15 parents through creation of the family connections program to  
16 strengthen families and prevent future child trauma. The legislature  
17 intends that the family connections program will put the child first,  
18 work to reduce family trauma, and support the child by helping adults  
19 learn, share, and work on understanding how best to support the child  
20 together.

1 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 74.13

2 RCW to read as follows:

3 (1) Beginning September 1, 2020, the department shall contract  
4 with an external organization or organizations with experience  
5 serving youth or families receiving out-of-home care services to  
6 implement and operate the family connections program, which  
7 facilitates interaction between a parent of a child found to be  
8 dependent pursuant to chapter 13.34 RCW and in out-of-home care and  
9 the individual with whom the child is placed.

10 (2) The external organization or organizations contracted to  
11 implement and operate the family connections program shall implement  
12 and operate the family connections program in one location west of  
13 the crest of the Cascade mountains, and one location east of the  
14 crest of the Cascade mountains.

15 (3) Families may be referred to the family connections program by  
16 a caseworker, an attorney, a guardian ad litem as defined in RCW  
17 13.34.030, a parent ally, an office of public defense social worker,  
18 or the court.

19 (4) After receiving a referral, the family connections program  
20 shall determine whether an in-person meeting between a parent of a  
21 child found to be dependent pursuant to chapter 13.34 RCW and in out-  
22 of-home care and the individual with whom the child is placed is  
23 appropriate. If the family connections program determines that such a  
24 meeting is appropriate, the family connections program shall then  
25 determine whether:

26 (a) The parent of a child found to be dependent pursuant to  
27 chapter 13.34 RCW and in out-of-home care and the individual with  
28 whom the child is placed are willing to participate in an in-person  
29 meeting; and

30 (b) Safety concerns exist such that an in-person meeting should  
31 not occur.

32 (5) If the family connections program determines that an in-  
33 person meeting should occur following the analysis required by  
34 subsection (4) of this section, the family connections program shall  
35 provide a referral to the family connections program team. The family  
36 connections program team shall include a parent ally and an  
37 experienced caregiver. After receiving a referral, the family  
38 connections program team shall:

39 (a) Ensure that the parent ally contact the parent to prepare for  
40 an in-person meeting between the parent and caregiver;

1 (b) Ensure that the experienced caregiver contact the caregiver  
2 to prepare for an in-person meeting between the parent and caregiver;

3 (c) Convene an in-person meeting between the parent and  
4 caregiver; and

5 (d) Provide ongoing support to the parent and caregiver following  
6 the in-person meeting.

7 (6) If the family connections program determines that an in-  
8 person meeting should not occur following the analysis required under  
9 subsection (4) of this section, the family connections program team  
10 shall facilitate the exchange of information between the parent and  
11 caregiver in an appropriate manner that does not include an in-person  
12 meeting. The format of this exchange of information may include  
13 written messages, phone calls, or videoconferencing. The family  
14 connections program shall routinely reevaluate whether an in-person  
15 meeting should occur using the analysis required under subsection (4)  
16 of this section.

17 (7) The department shall collect data and measure outcomes for  
18 families engaging in the family connections program. By September 1,  
19 2021, and in compliance with RCW 43.01.036, the department shall  
20 submit a report to the relevant committees of the legislature that  
21 details:

22 (a) Data collected for the family connections program;

23 (b) Outcomes for families engaging in the family connections  
24 program; and

25 (c) The department's plan on how to expand the family connections  
26 program statewide.

27 (8) The definitions in this subsection apply throughout this  
28 section:

29 (a) "Experienced caregiver" means:

30 (i) An individual who is or has received a foster-family home  
31 license pursuant to chapter 74.15 RCW or an equivalent license from  
32 another state; or

33 (ii) An individual who cared for a child who was removed from his  
34 or her parent pursuant to chapter 13.34 RCW and who has a kin  
35 relationship to that child pursuant to RCW 74.13.600.

36 (b) "Parent ally" has the same meaning as provided in RCW  
37 2.70.060.

38 (9) This section expires June 30, 2022.

1       **Sec. 3.** RCW 2.70.060 and 2015 c 117 s 2 are each amended to read  
2 as follows:

3       For the purposes of RCW 2.70.070 through ((2.70.100)) 2.70.090,  
4 "~~((child welfare))~~ parent (~~((mentor))~~) ally" means a parent who has  
5 successfully resolved the issues that led the parent's child into the  
6 care of the juvenile dependency court system, resulting in family  
7 reunification or another permanency outcome, and who has an interest  
8 in working collaboratively to improve the lives of children and  
9 families.

10       **Sec. 4.** RCW 2.70.070 and 2015 c 117 s 3 are each amended to read  
11 as follows:

12       (1) The goal of the parents for parents program is to increase  
13 the permanency and well-being of children in foster care through peer  
14 mentoring that increases parental engagement and contributes to  
15 family reunification.

16       (2) The parents for parents program may provide structured peer  
17 mentoring for families entering the dependency court system,  
18 administered by ~~((child welfare))~~ parent (~~((mentors))~~) allies.

19       **Sec. 5.** RCW 2.70.080 and 2015 c 117 s 4 are each amended to read  
20 as follows:

21       Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this  
22 specific purpose, components of the parents for parents program,  
23 provided by ~~((child welfare))~~ parent (~~((mentors))~~) allies, may include:

24       (1) Outreach and support to parents at dependency-related  
25 hearings, beginning with the shelter care hearing;

26       (2) A class that educates parents about the dependency system  
27 they must navigate in order to have their children returned, empowers  
28 them with tools and resources they need to be successful with their  
29 case plan, and provides information that helps them understand and  
30 support the needs of their children;

31       (3) Ongoing individual peer support to help parents involved with  
32 the child welfare system;

33       (4) Structured, curriculum-based peer support groups.

34       **Sec. 6.** RCW 2.70.090 and 2018 c 58 s 66 are each amended to read  
35 as follows:

36       (1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this  
37 specific purpose, the parents for parents program shall be funded

1 through the office of public defense and centrally administered  
2 through a pass-through to a Washington state nonprofit-lead  
3 organization that has extensive experience supporting ((child  
4 welfare)) parent ((mentors)) allies.

5 (2) Through the contract with the lead organization, each local  
6 program must be locally administered by the county superior court or  
7 a nonprofit organization that shall serve as the host organization.

8 (3) Local stakeholders representing key child welfare systems  
9 shall serve as parents for parents program advisors. Examples of  
10 local stakeholders include the department of children, youth, and  
11 families, the superior court, attorneys for the parents, assistant  
12 attorneys general, and court-appointed special advocates or guardians  
13 ad litem.

14 (4) A ((child-welfare)) parent ((mentor)) ally lead shall provide  
15 program coordination and maintain local program information.

16 (5) The lead organization shall provide ongoing training to the  
17 host organizations, statewide program oversight and coordination, and  
18 maintain statewide program information.

19 **Sec. 7.** RCW 74.13.802 and 2019 c 328 s 1 are each amended to  
20 read as follows:

21 (1) Beginning July 1, 2020, the department shall establish a  
22 child welfare housing assistance pilot program, which provides  
23 housing vouchers, rental assistance, navigation, and other support  
24 services to eligible families.

25 (a) The department shall operate or contract for the operation of  
26 the child welfare housing assistance pilot program under subsection  
27 (3) of this section in one county west of the crest of the Cascade  
28 mountain range and one county east of the crest of the Cascade  
29 mountain range.

30 (b) The child welfare housing assistance pilot program is  
31 intended to shorten the time that children remain in out-of-home  
32 care.

33 (2) A parent with a child who is dependent pursuant to chapter  
34 13.34 RCW and whose primary remaining barrier to reunification is the  
35 lack of appropriate housing is eligible for the child welfare housing  
36 assistance pilot program.

37 (3) The department shall contract with an outside entity or  
38 entities to operate the child welfare housing assistance pilot  
39 program. If no outside entity or entities are available to operate

1 the program or specific parts of the program, the department may  
2 operate the program or the specific parts that are not operated by an  
3 outside entity.

4 (4) Families may be referred to the child welfare housing  
5 assistance pilot program by a caseworker, an attorney, a guardian ad  
6 litem as defined in chapter 13.34 RCW, a ((child-welfare)) parent  
7 ((mentor)) ally as defined in RCW 2.70.060, an office of public  
8 defense social worker, or the court.

9 (5) The department shall consult with a stakeholder group that  
10 must include, but is not limited to, the following:

11 (a) Parent allies;

12 (b) Parent attorneys and social workers managed by the office of  
13 public defense parent representation program;

14 (c) The department of commerce;

15 (d) Housing experts;

16 (e) Community-based organizations;

17 (f) Advocates; and

18 (g) Behavioral health providers.

19 (6) The stakeholder group established in subsection (5) of this  
20 section shall begin meeting after July 28, 2019, and assist the  
21 department in design of the child welfare housing assistance pilot  
22 program in areas including, but not limited to:

23 (a) Equitable racial, geographic, ethnic, and gender distribution  
24 of program support;

25 (b) Eligibility criteria;

26 (c) Creating a definition of homeless for purposes of eligibility  
27 for the program; and

28 (d) Options for program design that include outside entities  
29 operating the entire program or specific parts of the program.

30 (7) By December 1, 2021, the department shall report outcomes for  
31 the child welfare housing assistance pilot program to the oversight  
32 board for children, youth, and families established pursuant to RCW  
33 43.216.015. The report must include racial, geographic, ethnic, and  
34 gender distribution of program support.

35 (8) The child welfare housing assistance pilot program  
36 established in this section is subject to the availability of funds  
37 appropriated for this purpose.

38 (9) This section expires June 30, 2022.

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