

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5506

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As of January 24, 2007

**Title:** An act relating to creating the department of family and children's services.

**Brief Description:** Creating the department of family and children's services.

**Sponsors:** Senator Stevens and Shin.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Human Services & Corrections: 1/18/07.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

**Staff:** Kiki Keizer (786-7425)

**Background:** The Joint Task Force on Administration and Delivery of Services to Children and Families was established in 2005 by Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5872 (ESSB 5872). Under the terms of ESSB 5872, the task force was required to determine the most appropriate and effective administrative structure for delivery of social and health services to the children and families of the state. The legislation specifically required the task force to compare the effectiveness of various administrative structures, such as operating as a division of an umbrella agency; establishing a separate social and health services agency with an administrator reporting directly to the Governor; or creating a children and family services cabinet reporting directly to the Governor. The task force was further directed to examine the administrative structures employed by other states to deliver social and health services to children and families. The task force met six times in 2005.

In 2006, the Legislature added two new members to the task force, representing the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Office of Public Defense. The task force met eight times in 2006.

Task force discussions focused on a variety of issues. Task force members worked to define the core functions and mission of the state's child welfare agency. In addition to reviewing what is expected of social workers by the agency and by families, task force members probed the type of support that social workers receive to do their jobs. They examined the array of services that are available to families throughout the state. The task force considered the types of administrative structures employed by other states to deliver services to children and families. They also heard presentations by a number of interested parties in our state and invited speakers from across the country to speak.

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On October 16, 2006, at a public task force meeting, a majority of task force members voted in favor of separating the Children's Administration from the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS).

**Summary of Bill:** The Department of Family and Children's Services (Department) is established as an agency whose director is appointed by and serves at the pleasure of the Governor subject to confirmation by the Senate.

All powers, duties, and functions of DSHS pertaining to children and family services are transferred to the Department.

The Director of Financial Management and the Secretary of DSHS must jointly develop a reorganization plan to implement the bill. The Director of Financial Management and the Secretary of DSHS must submit the reorganization plan to the Governor and the Legislature by November 1, 2007, along with any proposed legislation necessary to implement the plan.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

**Committee/Commission/Task Force Created:** No.

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

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: There has been discussion for a number of years about how to improve the delivery of services to children and families, and there have been previous proposals to separate the Children's Administration from the rest of the DSHS. There is probably no right or wrong way to structure a children's department, but we haven't seen the kind of change we had hoped would come from progressive changes in the statutory law over the past several years. Creating a new department would highlight and call attention to children and families. A change is not needed because of a single crisis or because we are dissatisfied with the current administration but because we have to learn from the past: we have not seen an ability, within the larger umbrella organization that is the DSHS, to make the kind of changes we need. As one of the experts who spoke to the task force said, it's easiest to change culture in a smaller, more flexible entity.

The task force members agreed that there were problems with the way the system works. For example, there are problems with the way that management treats line staff, and there are some services that are still not available to families. However, not all task force members agreed on how to fix the system, and the fiscal impact of breaking the Children's Administration out from the rest of the DSHS has not yet been established.

CON: The Children's Administration already has a wide range of initiatives underway, including addressing deficiencies revealed through the federal audit, complying with the terms of the *Braam* settlement agreement, implementing the statewide automated child welfare information system (SACWIS), and developing the agency's practice model. While the Governor has recommended a separate children's department in the past, she is concerned that a major reorganization of the department would divert resources and organizational capacity from the initiatives that are pending.

While all task force members agreed on the need to renew our focus on the well-being of children, there are different ways to reach that goal. Separating the Children's Administration from the rest of the DSHS is maybe one way to achieve that goal, but other avenues may be preferable.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator Val Stevens, prime sponsor; Laurie Lippold, Children's Home Society of Washington.

CON: Kari Burrell, Governor's Policy Office.