Brief Recap of Child Welfare Relevant Policies and Budget for the 2015 Legislative Session

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Legislation

HB 177 (Wilkerson-38th) When a school employee reports suspected child abuse to the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS), DFCS must acknowledge to the employee (in writing) the receipt of the report within 24 hours. Within five days of completing the investigation of the suspected child abuse, DFCS must disclose to the school counselor or, in absence of a counselor, the school principal, (in writing) whether or not the abuse was confirmed or unconfirmed. Status: SIGNED BY THE GOVERNOR

HB 268 (Ballinger-23rd) Makes it clear that when a mandatory child abuse reporter receives reliable information that child abuse has occurred involving another person who attends to a child pursuant to such person's duties as an employee of or volunteer at a hospital, school, social agency, or similar facility (in other words, another mandatory reporter), the person who received the information shall notify the person in charge of such hospital, school, agency, or facility, or the designated delegate thereof, and the person so notified shall report or cause a report to be made either in certain written form or orally with a written report later. Status: SIGNED BY THE GOVERNOR

SB 138 (Miller-49th) Legislation enacting some of the Governor's Child Welfare Reform Recommendations. The Governor would appoint and have direct oversight of the director of the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS). The bill also establishes the DFCS State Advisory Board and better defines the makeup and obligations of county and regional DFCS boards. It addresses the interagency sharing of data for the protection of children and allows a foster parent, as an agent of the DFCS, to have access to a child’s medical and educational records to ensure the proper care and education of a child entrusted to the foster parent’s care. The bill also creates a central child abuse registry. Status: SIGNED BY THE GOVERNOR

SB 72 (Mullis-53rd) Expands the definition of “incest” to include sexual intercourse or sodomy with stepchildren, and with a blood or marital relative of “the whole blood or of the half blood” for grandparent and grandchild, aunt and niece or nephew or uncle and niece or nephew. The bill also changes the offense of harassing phone calls to the offense of harassing communication, which includes contacting another person repeatedly via telecommunication, e-mail, text messaging or any other form of electronic communication (whether or not conversation ensues) for the purpose of annoying, harassing, or molesting, threatening, or intimidating that person or his/her family. The person who commits this offense would be guilty of a misdemeanor. In addition the bill creates penalties and fines for harming police dogs. Status: SIGNED BY THE GOVERNOR

HB 452 (Ballinger-23rd) “Protective Order Registry Act” – Expands the definition of Foreign Protective Order to encompass pretrial release orders and sentencing orders. It also expands the definition that prohibits contact (in addition to acts of family violence). Status: SIGNED BY THE GOVERNOR

Study Committees

HR 474 (Abrams-89th) Creates the House Study Committee on Grandparents Raising Grandchildren and Kinship Care. Status: PASSED HOUSE. Since this is a House Study Committee, it does not require passage by the Senate or signature by the governor

SB 487 (Unterman-45th) Creates the Joint Study Committee on Preventing Youth Substance Use Disorders. Status: PASSED SENATE. Since this is a Senate Study Committee, it does not require passage by the House or signature by the governor.

HR 640 (Broadrick-4th) Establishes a House Study Committee on School-Based Health Centers. Status: PASSED HOUSE. Since this is a House Study Committee, it does not require passage by the Senate or signature by the governor.
HR 641 (Dempsey-13th) Establishes a House Study Committee on Children’s Mental Health. Status: PASSED HOUSE. Since this is a House Study Committee, it does not require passage by the Senate or signature by the governor.

HR 642 (Dempsey-13th) Establishes a Joint Study Committee on Postsecondary Education and Employment Options for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. Status: PASSED HOUSE. Since this is a House Study Committee, it does not require passage by the Senate or signature by the governor.

SR 594 (McKoon-29th) Creates the Senate Rate of Diagnosis for Children With Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Related Disorders Study Committee. Status: PASSED SENATE. Since this is a Senate Study Committee, it does not require passage by the House or signature by the governor

Budget

Child Welfare (Notice that much of these originated in recommendations made by the Child Welfare Reform Council)

• $141.86 million For Child Welfare Services, including:
  • $4.98 million Added to annualize funds for 103 child protective services (CPS) caseworkers
  • $7.51 million Added for 175 more CPS caseworkers
  • $5.83 million Added for recruitment and training of foster parents
  • $1.03 million Added for mobile technologies for fieldwork in child welfare
  • $620,000 Added to enhance DFCS caseworker safety
  • $5 million Added to implement career ladders and performance-based increases for caseworkers and supervisors
  • $220,000 Added for a DFCS supervisor mentor pilot program
  • $414,200 Added for SHINES maintenance

• $120,000 Added to the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program for building capacity ($70,000) and annualize funds ($50,000) for criminal background investigations.

• $81.69 million For homes for children removed from their families due to neglect, abuse, or abandonment, including:
  • $9.81 million Added for growth in Out-of-Home Care use (because more children are in state custody as a result of a more effective child abuse reporting system)

• $230,000 Added for grants ($10,000 each) for Sexual Assault Centers to provide safe shelter and services for victims of family violence and their dependent children and to provide education about family violence to communities.

• $515,567 Cut from the teen health survey in the abstinence education programs from Governor’s Office for Children and Families(matched by feds to total $579,305 )

• $159,000 Added to increase GA Family Connection Partnership’s county allocations from $45,000 to $46,000.

• $100,000 Added for the Cold Case Project, which seeks to identify children most likely to age out of foster care without a family. (Governor requested $175,000)

• $70,000 Added for one investigator position in the Office of the Child Advocate (Governor requested $0 / Negotiated total = $70,000)

Child Welfare Budget Notes:
  • The abstinence education program and the Georgia AfterSchool and Youth Development Conference and Quality Standards were both recommended to be moved from the Governor’s Office of Children and Families to the Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention program in DFCS.

  • The Family Violence Program recommended to be moved from DFCS to the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council. Legislation (HB 263) was passed to this effect.

• $4.8 million Cut for one time transfer of foster children to managed care, which happened last year.