

**Department of Justice and Department of Human Services
Child Welfare Caseworker Representation**

The Public Safety Subcommittee recommends that the Joint Committee on Ways and Means acknowledge receipt of a joint report from the Department of Justice and the Department of Human Services on Child Welfare Caseworker Representation.

In 2013, some circuit court judges raised concern about DHS child welfare caseworkers appearing in court for some juvenile dependency hearings without legal representation. The Legislature passed HB 4156 in 2014 to allow DHS caseworkers to appear in court without legal representation until June 30, 2015, when the law sunsets.

DOJ and DHS were directed by budget note to develop options for legal services for the Child Welfare program. The report outlines three options, which all assume full legal representation for caseworkers at a projected biennial cost of about \$20 million, of which 70% would be funded with General Fund and 30% Federal Funds. The options would phase-in statewide coverage over the next two biennia.

The Subcommittee had expected a report that outlined more alternatives than just full legal representation. The Subcommittee noted that SB 222, relating to the appearance by attorneys in juvenile court proceedings, was amended to include full representation, and is now in the Joint Committee on Ways and Means for consideration.

The Public Safety Subcommittee recommends acknowledging receipt of the report.