

SB 1515

Relating to child welfare

On February 24th, the Human Services Subcommittee voted to recommend passage of SB 1515, with amendments.

SB 1515 makes statutory changes to improve the accountability of both the Department of Human Services and child-caring agencies. These agencies care for children in proctor foster homes or other care settings; the bill does not affect certified foster homes. The bill sets out licensing criteria and other standards for child-caring agencies, along with establishing conditions for full compliance and specifying actions DHS can take if a program is found to be out of compliance.

For these providers, the bill expands the definition of child to include 18 to 20 year olds and creates a specific definition of child abuse. Failure to investigate or take other action may be grounds for DHS official misconduct. The bill requires DHS to report on substantiated findings, as well as on the feasibility of national accreditation and a Center for Continuous Improvement for providers.

The Subcommittee amendment adds \$369,031 General Fund, \$272,677 Other Funds, and \$253,564 Federal Funds to cover 2015-17 costs. This supports an investigator and 2 licensing staff for DHS and an attorney at the Department of Justice. Changes are effective mid-biennium, so costs for 2017-19 will be higher.

The Human Services Subcommittee recommends SB 1515 be amended by the -A8 amendment and be reported out do pass, as amended.