



IOWA HOUSE DEMOCRATS

BILL SUMMARY

Family First Act HF 644

Status of Bill: House Calendar

Committee: Human Resources (20-0)

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Lead Democrat: Rep. Sunde

Floor Manager: Rep. Bergan

Background

The Family First Act (FFA) is a federal initiative that will completely restructure how federal money is used for child welfare. Currently, most of the funding goes towards services once the children are removed from their home. FFA changes that to focus on preserving families, and putting more emphasis for keeping children with their families or in family settings. This Act must be implemented at the state level no later than October 1, 2021, but Iowa plans on beginning July 1, 2020. In order to keep receiving federal funding, Iowa needs to restructure some of their policies and programs. This bill is the first step in conforming to these federal regulations.

Summary

Section 1: Retaining Suitable Existing Health Providers

This section works to prevent misdiagnosis of a child, and to keep their existing doctors and dentists intact. This is to conform to the new protocols that ensure children are placed in a non-family setting due to a misdiagnosis of mental illness, behavioral disorders, medically fragile conditions, or developmental disabilities. However, if the health provider is found to not be suitable, a new provider may be used.

Section 2: Proof of Foster Care Letters

Requires the Department of Human Services (DHS) to give all youth in foster care for more than six months all the documentation necessary to prove they were in foster care. This documentation can be used to apply for Medicaid or educational assistance once the child turns 18. Children in foster care already receive a copy of their birth certificate, social security card, and a driver's license once they turn 18.

Section 3: Promoted Visits between Child and Parent

This section allows parents to visit their children in foster care even if they have recently had drugs in their system. This promotes children having frequent visits with their parents, which is a key pillar of the FFA. The FFA believes that by not allowing a parent to see their children, this is punishing the child, not the parent.

Section 4: Kinship Support

One important step in the FFA is promoting practices that keep a child from entering into the foster care system in the first place. This means adding "an individual person with a meaningful relationship with the child" to the list of people who are notified once a child is taken away from their family. This person does not have to be a family member, but already has an established relationship with the child. This reflects best practice of keeping children as close to their own family as possible. It is also intended to reduce the stress of the child by staying with someone they know.

Section 5 and 6: Background Checks

These two sections amend the background checks any adult working in residential facilities must pass before they are hired. The FFA requires child welfare agencies to use national crime information databases and child abuse registries when checking a potential employee's fingerprints. Currently, these background checks apply only to an employee who will have access to a child when the child is alone. The FFA expands this to any adult working in a facility where children reside.

Section 7: Case Plan Requirements

This section requires DHS to amend the rules directing the case manager of a child entering foster care to document the activities found in section one of the bill.

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