
OLR Bill Analysis

SB 156

AN ACT CONCERNING SIBLING VISITATION FOR CHILDREN IN THE CARE AND CUSTODY OF THE COMMISSIONER OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.

SUMMARY:

This bill establishes minimum visitation requirements for separated siblings of children placed in Department of Children and Families (DCF) care and custody, including children in foster homes. Specifically, it requires the DCF commissioner to ensure that visits occur, on average, at least once a week, unless the commissioner determines that allowing such frequent visits would not be in the child's best interests. When the commissioner makes such a determination, the child's treatment plan must state the reasons for it.

The bill requires the commissioner to report by October 1 annually to the Select Committee on Children data sufficient to demonstrate DCF has complied with the entire sibling visitation law.

It also requires the DCF commissioner to meet with each branch of the Youth Advisory Board to get recommendations for creating a "Sibling Bill of Rights."

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2014, except for the Sibling Bill of Rights provision, which is effective upon passage.

MINIMUM WEEKLY VISITS FOR SIBLINGS

By law, DCF must ensure that a child placed in its care or custody either through an order of temporary custody or commitment is provided visits with his or her parents and siblings, unless the court orders otherwise.

If the child has an existing relationship with a sibling and is separated from that sibling as a result of DCF intervening, including

placing the child in a foster home or the home of a relative, DCF must ensure that the child has access to, and visitation rights with, that sibling, based on a consideration of the child's best interests. The bill requires the commissioner to ensure that these visits occur, on average, at least once a week unless the commissioner finds that this would not be in the best interests of each sibling.

If the DCF commissioner determines that the weekly visits are not in either sibling's best interest, the bill requires her to include the reasons for this determination in the child's treatment plan.

SIBLING BILL OF RIGHTS

The bill requires the DCF commissioner to meet with the members of each branch of the Youth Advisory Board (YAB) to gather recommendations for and to draft a "Sibling Bill of Rights." This document can include (1) ways to protect relationships of siblings who are separated as a result of DCF intervention and (2) DCF affirming its commitment to preserve these relationships.

DCF must incorporate the final version of the bill of rights into departmental policy and share it with each child who is placed in the commissioner's care and custody. The DCF commissioner and the YAB members must also submit the bill of rights to the Select Committee on Children by October 1, 2013 for the committee to consider possible legislative action.

BACKGROUND

Youth Advisory Board

The YAB is composed of youth in DCF care. The board addresses DCF policies and procedures that affect them. Youth on the board also establish civic connections within their communities as they transition from out-of-home care.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Select Committee on Children

Joint Favorable Change of Reference
Yea 12 Nay 0 (03/06/2012)

Human Services Committee

Joint Favorable

Yea 16 Nay 0 (03/22/2012)