

Human Services Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-912

AN ACT CONCERNING FUNDING AND OVERSIGHT OF FATHERHOOD

Title: INITIATIVES.

Vote Date: 3/31/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 2/23/2021

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Human Services Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill would establish an Advisory Council of the Connecticut Fatherhood Initiative (CFI), with the objective of promoting the positive involvement and interaction of fathers with their children and identifying services to assist fathers in that goal. The JFS language establishes the CFI Advisory Council within the Department of Social Services, as it is the lead agency for CFI. It also delineates the goals of the council and specifies additional membership of the council. In lieu of the \$3 million in new funding requested in the original bill, the JFS states that the Commissioner of Social Services shall seek to obtain any available federal and private funds that promote CFI objectives.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Dr. Deidre S. Gifford, Commissioner, Department of Social Services

Commissioner Gifford testified that she believes the objectives of this legislation can be achieved within the existing CFI framework. Currently, CFI is a multi-agency effort and includes a broad array of executive branch and non-profit organization representatives. She expressed concern that a new advisory council with similar membership would risk diluting the work already being undertaken. The Commissioner also explained that the members of the existing CFI council are party to a Memorandum of Understanding, in order to continue to work towards fulfilling the objectives of the program, and coordinating services for fathers and their families. The CFI council has also developed a strategic plan of both short- and long-term goals. Finally, the Commissioner noted that the funding requested in the original bill is

not provided for either in the current budgetary assumptions or in the Governor's proposed budget.

Vannessa Dorantes, Commissioner, Department of Children and Families

Commissioner Dorantes shared the depth of commitment DCF has made to various fatherhood programs over the years. Some of their efforts include work on a national collaborative sponsored by Mathematica; the department's Fatherhood Engagement Services (FES); a pilot program with the Department of Correction called Families Supporting Reentry; and the Fathers for Change initiative, offered through DCF's Intimate Partner Violence Assessment and Intervention Response program. In addition, she highlighted some of the practices of the Fatherhood Engagement Leadership Teams, present in each of the 6 DCF regions. The Commissioner also noted that the participants in DCF's Leadership Academy for Middle Managers have offered change initiatives, such as bringing FES providers and Intensive Family Prevention staff together to work on high risk cases to enhance fathers' engagement with their families.

The Commissioner added that a large segment of DCF services stem from CFI, that DCF was a founding partner in the initiative, and that the department hosts annual Fatherhood Conferences. She concluded that, "The Department would appreciate the opportunity to participate in any legislatively approved body to offer our experiences but also to learn from the expertise of others around the table."

State of Connecticut Judicial Branch

The Judicial Branch did not take a stance on the proposed policy, but recommended that the Chief Court Administrator or their designee be a member of the CFI Advisory Council. They noted that the Judicial Branch's Support Enforcement Services and Family Support Magistrates have had significant involvement with CFI over the years.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Deb Polun, Executive Director, Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA)

Ms. Polun supports this legislation, as research shows the vital importance of fatherhood engagement. CAFCA currently partners with DSS, serving as the state contractor for CFI, working with six community-based agencies (including one Community Action Agency, or CAA) statewide. Given the important work CFI does helping fathers in regards to promoting financial and legal responsibility, and strengthening emotional connections, CAFCA supports expanding the program and partnering with additional CAAs.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed

Reported by: Heather Ferguson-Hull

Date: April 7, 2021