

OFFICE OF FISCAL ANALYSIS

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sHB-5004

AN ACT CONCERNING CHILD WELFARE ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY.

As Amended by House "A" (LCO 5360), House "C" (LCO 5424)
House Calendar No.: 97

OFA Fiscal Note

State Impact:

Agency Affected	Fund-Effect	FY 27 \$	FY 28 \$
Children & Families, Dept.	GF - Cost	At least 1,293,900	At least 437,900
Children & Families, Dept.	GF - Potential Cost	See Below	See Below
State Comptroller - Fringe Benefits ¹	GF - Cost	47,200	113,400
Social Services, Dept.	GF - Cost	See Below	See Below

Note: GF=General Fund

Municipal Impact: None

Explanation

The bill, which establishes several new Department of Children and Families (DCF) programs and services and makes other changes regarding DCF, results in an estimated General Fund cost of at least \$1,341,100 in FY 27 and \$551,300 annually thereafter as described below. This estimate does not include any grant or stipend costs related to such programs created by the bill, as those costs are dependent on the amount of funding provided.

¹The fringe benefit costs for most state employees are budgeted centrally in accounts administered by the Comptroller. The estimated active employee fringe benefit cost associated with most personnel changes is 41.82% of payroll in FY 27.

Sections 1 and 2 result in no fiscal impact. They give emergency placement and court proceedings preference to a child's relative or fictive kin, as well as require written documentation and explanation in instances where the DCF commissioner deviates from such placement preference. Section 1 additionally requires certain written disclosures after an initial foster care license application is denied and allows for appeal.

Sections 3 and 4 establish two new DCF grant programs for certain caregivers to help cover: (1) child necessities; and (2) after school program and child care service costs. This results in a cost of at least \$64,100 in FY 27 and \$128,100 annually thereafter for one new Grants and Contracts Specialist to administer both grant programs. The annualized salary for this position is approximately \$90,300, plus \$37,800 in fringe benefits.² The costs of the grants are dependent on the funding provided and provisions of the grant programs,³ with half-year costs in FY 27.

Section 5 requires DCF to establish paid social worker internship and first-year social worker employee mentorship programs. This results in a cost of at least \$96,000 in FY 27 and \$128,100 annually thereafter for one new training program supervisor to implement the mentorship program, including providing training. The annualized salary for this position is approximately \$90,300, plus \$37,800 in fringe benefits.⁴

There are additional costs to provide participants in both the internship and mentorship programs with stipends beginning in FY 27, with half-year costs in the first fiscal year, subject to provided funding and provisions of each program. For the mentorship program, only mentors are required to be provided stipends. The department is allowed to pay a stipend to each mentee who completes the program.

² The FY 27 cost is \$45,200 in salary and \$18,900 in fringe benefits.

³ The necessities grants are maximum \$625 to any eligible caregiver. Additionally, the after school program and child care services grant amounts provided in any fiscal year must not exceed 50% of the available program funding for that year.

⁴ The FY 27 cost is \$67,700 in salary and \$28,300 in fringe benefits.

Sections 6 through 8 require DCF to provide several mandatory employee training programs regarding perinatal mood and anxiety disorder, human trafficking, and cultural sensitivity. This results in: (1) a potential cost of up to \$30,000 in FY 28 to develop new trainings; and (2) a cost of \$90,300 (plus \$37,800 fringe benefits) in FY 28 and annually thereafter to hire one training program supervisor who will provide the trainings.

Section 9 expands existing DCF postsecondary education assistance to certain youth receiving DCF services post majority who are between 18 and 21 years old, with continued assistance possible until age 24. The bill creates a new grant program for this purpose (and available to younger youth receiving services post majority), resulting in cost to DCF beginning in FY 27 (half-year costs for the first fiscal year) subject to: (1) program participation; and (2) the grant formula. There are approximately 220 youth in DCF services post majority.

DCF currently offers postsecondary education (PSE) financial assistance for youth ages 18 through 20 (with extensions possible through age 23) who were/are: (1) foster children adopted as minors; or (2) either committed to DCF or receiving DCF services post majority. An eligible student may receive PSE assistance equivalent to the Central Connecticut State University comprehensive rate. DCF's current agency budget for the PSE program is approximately \$15 million.

Section 10 requires the Auditors of Public Accounts (APA) to conduct a performance audit of the postsecondary education grant program, resulting in no fiscal impact because the APA has the necessary staff and expertise to meet the requirements of the bill.

Section 11 requires DCF to create a website to provide information regarding agency programs and services, including a public online dashboard providing real-time information. This results in a one-time cost to DCF of at least \$100,000 to \$200,000 in FY 27, and an ongoing annual maintenance cost of approximately \$5,000 beginning in FY 28. These costs reflect the bill's requirement to develop and service another website (instead of using DCF's existing website infrastructure).

This preliminary estimate does not consider additional costs related to building the initial dashboard infrastructure such as data connection and structuring. Costs related to this may be substantial due to the technical complexity of live-update interactive dashboards and the agency's inexperience with the new CT-KIND System. Additionally, costs may vary depending on the capabilities of existing staff and potential need for outside consultants.

While DCF has indicated some data is currently transferrable to a web-based dashboard that is in early development, it is less technically complex than what the bill specifies for update frequency. Additional costs are also dependent on the total amount, availability, and complexity of information required to be included on the dashboard as determined by the working group established in Section 12.

In addition to the dashboard, the website must also include public information regarding DCF programs and services, information on child abuse and neglect identification and reporting, and free mandated reporter educational training accessible to the public without a username or password. The agency has the capacity to display these existing materials publicly.

Section 12 establishes a working group to determine additional information to be displayed on the new service dashboard, resulting in no fiscal impact.

Section 13 mandates an out-of-state child notification and welfare check procedure to be initiated by the DCF Commissioner when a DCF-involved youth is out of state for more than 14 days. This results in no fiscal impact as the agency has the capacity to make the required contacts as required by the bill.

Section 14 prohibits a caregiver's voluntary mental health treatment from being the basis of DCF action, resulting in no fiscal impact.

Section 15 requires DCF personnel to consider opinions expressed by children in their investigations, resulting in no fiscal impact.

Section 16 requires DCF to provide personal emergency communication devices to certain DCF staff who wish to avail themselves, resulting in an anticipated net cost of \$81,000 to \$121,500 in FY 27 and \$162,000 to \$243,000 annually thereafter.

The agency would acquire approximately 1,000 to 1,500 units (with an anticipated monthly cost of \$27 each, with no one-time start-up cost) to outfit DCF staff who frequently make in-home visits. The mobile GPS alert units require a recurring subscription to connect to a 24/7 emergency response center. These ongoing costs would qualify for partial reimbursement (50%) through federal Title IV-E funding.

Section 17 requires DCF to establish an urgent crisis center (UCC) in Stamford for the duration of FY 27, resulting in: (1) a cost of \$1 million to \$2.5 million to DCF in FY 27 only; and (2) additional Medicaid costs to the Department of Social Services (DSS).

DCF does not operate or manage any UCCs, but historically has licensed and contracted private providers for this purpose. From FY 23 through FY 25, DCF grant funding through ARPA subsidized the cost of UCC development and care for non-Medicaid eligible children experiencing a mental health crisis. The operational cost to DCF for the new Stamford location is estimated to be similar to past expenditures, dependent on regional service utilization differences.

Current funding for UCCs mainly relies on allocations in the state budget through Medicaid. DSS will incur increased Medicaid costs, which are dependent on Medicaid eligible patients and associated utilization of services at the new UCC.

Section 18 establishes a Child Welfare Policy and Oversight Committee to evaluate: (1) recommendations concerning the operation, policies, and service outcomes of state agencies providing child welfare services; and (2) the efficacy and continued operation of existing state-wide boards, committees and councils charged with oversight and evaluation of child welfare services. This results in no fiscal impact as the Committee may obtain administrative support from a consulting

child welfare organization.

Sections 19 and 20 require DCF and collaborating agencies to produce new reports on: (1) DCF service collaboration with the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP); and (2) ways to ensure the immediate removal from an out-of-home placement of any child who becomes an assault victim in or due to such placement. This results in no fiscal impact, as the agencies have the necessary expertise to meet the requirements of the bill.

Section 21 makes certain procedural changes authorizing the Department of Public Health in certain circumstances to release information relating to an acknowledgment of parentage, resulting in no fiscal impact.

Section 22 expands the scope of child abuse and neglect reports necessitating immediate investigation and tightens the timeframe, resulting in a potential cost to DCF beginning in FY 27 to the extent⁵ these case prioritizations require additional staff to efficiently manage overall caseloads.

House "A" strikes the underlying bill and its associated fiscal impact, resulting in the impacts described above.

House "C" requires DCF to conduct in-home safety evaluations of any individual under the age of 18 who resides with certain individuals on probation or parole, resulting in a potential cost to the agency beginning in FY 27. DCF may require additional staff and resources to accommodate the visitation schedules required by the bill. The extent of the potential cost is dependent on: (1) the number of individuals on probation or parole for certain offenses that share a residence with a child; (2) the length of probation or parole for the individuals; and (3)

⁵ Investigations of child abuse or neglect reports typically begin within 24 to 72 hours from receipt of an initial report unless a child is in imminent risk of physical harm or the abuse or neglect claim is against a parent/guardian, or certain other circumstances apply. DCF must make its "best efforts" to commence an investigation of such reports within two hours of their receipt, pursuant to CGS Sec. 17a-101g.

the duration each child resides with such individuals.

The Out Years

The annualized ongoing fiscal impact identified above would continue into the future subject to inflation and participation in the postsecondary education grant program.