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PILOT FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT CENTERS

House Bill 5242 (Substitute H-1)
First Analysis (11-29-01)

Sponsor: Rep. Barb Vander Veen
Committee: Family and Children
Services

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

According to committee testimony, there are approximately 9,000 children on any given day placed in licensed non-relative foster homes. According to the FIA, there were over 23,000 foster care cases in the state at the end of the 1999-2000 fiscal year. Foster parents play a vital role in providing a stable and loving family environment for children. Many children placed with foster families often have been abused or neglected or have special needs, both of which can be very taxing on the child's foster parents.

Meeting the needs of foster parents and children is seen as an important step in retaining capable foster parents and promoting permanency in foster care placements. While the number of children placed in foster care continues to increase, the number of foster parents continues to decrease. A majority of former foster parents choose to no longer continue as foster parents because they have adopted a child. Many others choose to no longer serve as foster parents because of health problems, the need to care for other family members, or a move. Among the several negative reasons why foster parents do not continue are the increase in children with complex special needs, the lack of adequate support and training for foster parents, the inadequate financial reimbursement that does not cover actual child care, and the poor relationship that sometimes exists between the families and the agencies and other social workers.

In 1999, Representatives Doug Hart, Mark Jansen, and Joanne Voorhees convened a work group co-chaired by the Michigan Federation of Private Child and Family Agencies and the Michigan Foster and Adoptive Parent Association. The work group was charged with the task of identifying and recommending action regarding several issues related to foster care, including the general profile of foster parents; the principal factors causing people to continue or discontinue foster parenting; the current

system of payment; the demographic trends in children needing foster care; and the support services that are most important to foster parents.

One recommendation of the work group was the creation a pilot program establishing four to six resource centers designed to support and coordinate respite care, assist foster parents in obtaining day care, and support agency staff in retaining foster parents. The services of these programs should be based on the needs of the local community. Legislation has been introduced that would establish a pilot program for these resource centers.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would amend the Foster Care and Adoption Services Act to allow the Family Independence Agency to implement a pilot program establishing foster and adoptive parent resource centers. Under the pilot program, the FIA could establish no more than six resource centers. Each center would have to provide support and coordination for respite care and assistance to foster parents in obtaining day care. In addition, resource center staff would have to pursue other activities designed to promote permanency for children, especially those children with special needs, such as support aimed at retaining foster parents. These resource centers would be using money funds appropriated to the FIA for the current fiscal year.

MCL 722.958

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

One example of a resource center provided to the Committee on Family and Children Services is the Foster and Adoptive Family Resource and Support Center in Battle Creek. The center provides educational support and assistance to foster, adoptive, and kinship families in the Battle Creek area. Each month, the center provides families with food boxes

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containing cereal, canned goods and special treats for the children. Though the FIA does provide money for clothing expenses, the center also provides a clothing closet to assist families because many children come into a home with little or no clothing. In addition, the center, with assistance from area churches, provides foster children with a new toy, underwear, a change of clothes, pajamas, and other personal care items. With the help of community organizations and local businesses, the center has also been able to provide foster children with back to school supplies.

The bill specifies that the resource centers would support and coordinate respite care. Respite care is short term, temporary care often provided to special needs children to allow their families to “take a break” from daily child care. Respite care often ranges from a few hours per month to overnight care, which enables parents to be able to search for employment or housing, keep necessary appointments, take a vacation, or just take a few hours off. Advocates say that respite care helps prevent abuse or neglect, and can even support family unity.

One example of this is the Take a Break Child Care Center operated by the Foster Adoptive Family Resource and Support Center. The center offers respite care for children from ages 2 weeks to 12 years old, to give parents the opportunity to take time off a few hours up to six times per month. Up to 20 children (10 full-time and 10 drop-in) are allowed each day. Rates for drop-in are \$2.25 per hour for children 2½ to 12 years, and \$3 per hour for children 2 weeks to 2½ years of age. Full-time rates for children 2 weeks to 2½ years are \$120 per week and \$90 per week for children 2½ years to 12 years. The center accepts FIA child-care payments.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

According to the House Fiscal Agency, the bill would have an indeterminate cost impact on the state and local governments. FIA currently provides post adoption services in the six regional centers and provides foster care parent support through contracts. It is unclear if the bill would require significant redirection of current funds or the use of additional funds. (HFA fiscal note dated 11-28-01)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

The bill would help foster parents obtain day care and respite care. Helping foster and adoptive families meet the day care and respite care needs of the child is often seen as an important factor at recruiting and retaining capable foster parents. This is essential in providing a stable home environment for children. In many instances, foster parents are unable to meet the necessary day care requirements, leaving them unable to serve as foster parents. For many foster parents of special needs children, the task of care for these children is extremely daunting. This often places a great strain on these families and leaves them feeling burnt out. In either case, the lack of adequate outside care discourages many from serving or continuing to serve as foster parents.

For:

According to the FIA, 80 percent of foster home replacements are at the request of the foster parents. The constant removal and replacement of foster children greatly affects their well being. Often, foster parents are unable to continue because the financial requirements are too great, or they simply are not capable of providing the requisite care for a special needs child. Not all foster care placement agencies are able to provide families with an adequate level of support. The resource centers are seen as a means to provide additional support to foster families. Centers can provide foster families with such tangible benefits as food, clothes, and toys. In addition, the resource centers can offer mentoring and counseling programs to properly train and prepare a foster family.

Response:

As introduced, the bill would have required the FIA to establish from four to six resource centers as pilot projects, and identified a specific source of funds for the centers. The substitute says the department “may” establish up to six such centers and pay for them out of its current fiscal year budget.

Against:

Some people believe that these resource centers will be redundant and could conflict with existing agencies. In light of the state’s fiscal status, funding these resource centers could take away funds from placement agencies.

Response:

Presumably, these pilot centers would be placed in areas where the needs of foster families are not being met by other agencies. Furthermore, these centers

could foster partnerships with the families and with other agencies.

Against:

Though this would be a pilot program, the bill does not require it to be evaluated. There is no timeline as to when the program should be re-evaluated. There is no mandated study into the effectiveness or the costs of these resource centers. Should the legislature consider creating these resource centers throughout the state, it would have nothing to base its decision on.

POSITIONS:

The Michigan Federation of Private Child and Family Agencies supports the bill. (11-28-01)

The Michigan Foster and Adoptive Parent Association supports the bill but would prefer that it require, rather than allow, the FIA to implement the pilot program, and also that the program be “consumer-driven”. (11-29-01)

The Family Independence Agency supports the concept of the bill. (11-28-01)

Analyst: M. Wolf

■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.