

Fiscal Note

BILL # HB 2651

TITLE: missing children; alert; notification; reporting

SPONSOR: Parker B

STATUS: As Introduced

PREPARED BY: Ryan Fleischman

Description

The bill would require the Department of Child Safety (DCS) within 24 hours of receiving a report to notify certain people and entities of missing, abducted, or runaway children in DCS care and collect specified information about the child. Within 48 hours, DCS would be required to notify local media outlets. DCS would be required to provide additional training for employees to meet the bill's requirements and conduct regular efforts regarding missing children. The Legislature may require an annual independent audit of DCS compliance, which may then require DCS to contract with a third-party to oversee the agency's efforts to locate missing, abducted, or runaway children if it is determined that DCS is not in compliance.

Estimated Impact

We estimate that the bill's reporting and staff training requirements would generate additional workload for DCS staff and increase agency operational costs which may require additional FTE Positions. The actual magnitude of such costs will depend on the number of missing children throughout the year and the extent to which DCS already meets the bill's requirements.

We also estimate that the optional annual audit and possible third-party contract with DCS could generate additional operational costs if the Legislature requires it. Based on prior similar audits, we estimate the optional annual audit could cost \$200,000 to \$300,000 to complete.

DCS has not yet responded with an estimate.

Analysis

DCS defines a child in its custody as "missing" when the child cannot be located or whose parent or relatives absconded with the child. As of December 2022, DCS designated 156 of the individuals in its custody as runaway or missing/abducted.

The bill would require DCS to notify certain people and entities within 24 hours after receiving information that a child in DCS care is missing, abducted, or a runaway. These include the child's parents, known relatives, caregivers, attorney, court appointed special advocate, in addition to state and national centers for missing children and the Attorney General to initiate pickup or return orders, if applicable. DCS would also be required to contact all persons known to have information on the child's location to obtain information about his or her disappearance. The bill would also require DCS to provide information on the child, including physical description, photographs, and last known location, to "all local media outlets."

(Continued)



There are further requirements for ongoing efforts to locate missing children, including documenting within 10 days every effort made to locate them. DCS would also be required to contact many of the same entities listed above when a child has been found and conduct additional screening of the child. Without input from DCS, we cannot determine whether these requirements exceed DCS' current efforts and generate additional agency workload that may require additional FTE Positions.

HB 2651 would require DCS to provide additional training for staff on department policies and efforts for locating missing children, including training for contacting known connections to the child and working with law enforcement and other entities to conduct in-person and social media searches. The additional training could increase agency operational costs.

The bill would also require DCS to provide monthly reports to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House. The report would include the names of all current missing, abducted, and runaway children, the agencies DCS has contacted and when contact was made, and information on DCS' compliance in meeting the bill's requirements. The monthly report could generate additional workload for DCS staff. The magnitude of the workload increase would depend on how much information would be included in the reports as there are few specific requirements.

The Legislature would have the option to require an annual independent audit of DCS' compliance with the bill's requirements, which could then require DCS to contract with a third party to continue ongoing oversight of its efforts to locate missing children. The bill does not specify an entity to conduct the audit, nor a third party DCS is to contract with if it is not in compliance. Both components could generate additional operational costs. Based on prior similar audits, we estimate the optional annual audit could cost \$200,000 to \$300,000 to complete.

Local Government Impact

None

2/27/23