

SUBJECT: Studying the feasibility of providing financial incentives for CPS training

COMMITTEE: Human Services — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 8 ayes — Hupp, Eissler, A. Allen, J. Davis, Goodman, Naishtat, Paxton, Reyna

0 nays

1 absent — Gonzalez Toureilles

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, May 3 — 31-0, on Local and Uncontested Calendar

WITNESSES: No public hearing

BACKGROUND: Child Protective Services (CPS) is the state child welfare service administered by the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), and housed under the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC). When CPS receives a report of abuse, neglect, or abandonment, case workers conduct an investigation and may offer services to stop or prevent abuse or neglect while the child stays in the home or may remove the child for placement in foster care.

In 2003, CPS received 186,000 reports alleging abuse and neglect, and since that time, such reports have continued to rise. Despite the fact that additional funding for staff, including caseworkers, has been provided in each legislative session subsequent to 1995, when 607 FTEs were cut through the appropriations process, average caseloads for investigators still have risen from 47.9 per month in November 2001 to the current level of 74 per month. Texas' high caseload is in large part held responsible for entry-level caseworker turnover rates exceeding 30 percent and an inability on the part of local offices to fill vacancies.

DIGEST: SB 984 would require HHSC, in cooperation with any appropriate state agency, to study the feasibility of providing a financial incentive to individuals to assist them in receiving training for child protective services. The study would:

- consider the feasibility of creating a private foundation to solicit and receive money that would be used to assist those individuals;
- consider means of providing a financial incentive, including educational or living stipends or reimbursement of tuition costs, and determine the most effective means to deliver the incentives;
- suggest criteria that would have to be met to receive the incentives;
- estimate the costs to the state of providing incentives; and
- estimate the savings and costs associated with improved training of that may result from providing financial incentives.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2005, and the commission would report the results of the study to the appropriate Senate and House committees by September 1, 2006.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CPS is in crisis, with burdensome caseloads, excessive turnover, and extensive position vacancies. Currently, there is no mechanism for reimbursing a person who pursues training to become a CPS caseworker. Examples in education and nursing have demonstrated success in providing financial incentives to overcome shortages in qualified workers in these fields. Creating a similar system to reimburse people who pursued child protective services training would have the same positive outcome in attracting more qualified individuals to work in that field. SB 984 would result in no costs to the state, and a component of the study would consider the feasibility of setting up a foundation to finance the incentives through donations.

If the study established that financial incentives were feasible, and HHSC established a program for this purpose, the outcome would be an increase in the number of persons trained for careers in child protective services, which ultimately would help fill vacancies in a timely manner and ensure that caseworkers had the necessary skills to effectively serve Texas children.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

No apparent opposition.

NOTES: The House companion bill, HB 3327 by Uresti, was reported favorably, without amendment, by the Human Services Committee on April 28.