

# ASSEMBLY HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE

## STATEMENT TO

### **ASSEMBLY, No. 3707**

with committee amendments

# **STATE OF NEW JERSEY**

DATED: OCTOBER 17, 2022

The Assembly Human Services Committee reports favorably Assembly Bill No. 3707 with committee amendments.

As amended by the committee, this bill makes various changes to the New Jersey Child Abuse and Neglect Task Force.

Specifically, the bill amends section 2 of P.L.1994, C.119 (C.9:6-8.75) to allocate the task force in, but not, of, the Department of Children and Families (DCF). Notwithstanding its allocation in the DCF, the task force will be independent of any supervision or control by the DCF. Currently, the task force is not allocated to any department and functions as a separate entity outside of the purview of any department.

The bill also amends section 2 of P.L.1994, C.119 (C.9:6-8.75) to expand the purview of the Staffing and Oversight Review Subcommittee (subcommittee) to: (1) include the review and development of recommendations regarding the performance of the Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCPP); and (2) review, analyze, and make recommendations regarding the DCF's performance in providing child welfare services to children and families as outlined in the bill. No later than 12 months after the bill's enactment and annually thereafter, the subcommittee will be required to report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and Legislature. Current law requires the subcommittee to only review and develop recommendations regarding the staffing levels of the division and does not specify the types of services provided by the DCF or when the review is to be completed.

The bill further amends section 2 of P.L.1994, C.119 (C.9:6-8.75) to require the: (1) Commissioner of DCF to annually allocate sufficient funding to permit the subcommittee to hire independent contracted staff or obtain other resources needed to carry out the responsibilities set forth in the bill; and (2) task force to appoint at least 15 members to the subcommittee to review the department's performance and develop recommendations. Currently, the task force does not provide funding to the subcommittee to review, analyze, and make recommendations regarding the DCF's performance, nor does current law require that the task force appoint members to the subcommittee to conduct the review and

develop the recommendations required pursuant to the provisions of the bill.

The bill also requires the Commissioner of Children and Families to ensure that no child protection worker is concurrently responsible for more than 15 cases at any time, unless the commissioner determines that the assignment of cases in excess of this limit is temporarily necessary to ensure the life and safety of any child under the care and supervision of the DCF.

If the average daily caseload of child protection workers exceeds 15 cases per worker for two consecutive months, the department is to be considered non-compliant with caseload standards established pursuant to bill and is to: (1) within 14 days of initial non-compliance, deliver to the Governor, the Legislature, and the subcommittee, notice of the non-compliance and a summary of emergent efforts being made to rectify the non-compliance; and (2) post, on a monthly basis, on the DCF's Internet website, the average daily Statewide caseload of child protection workers until the average daily caseload has been maintained at 15 or fewer cases per worker for 30 days.

#### COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS

The committee amended the bill to specify that public and private agencies awarded grants for the purposes of planning and establishing or improving programs and services for the prevention of child abuse and neglect are to continue to publish information about the problems of child abuse and neglect available to the public and organizations and agencies through a publicly accessible online portal.

The committee amendments require the Commissioner of DCF to annually allocate sufficient funding to permit the subcommittee to hire independent contracted staff or obtain other resources needed to carry out the responsibilities set forth in the bill, instead of the Legislature appropriating funds to the DCF for such purposes, as originally provided in the bill.

The committee amendments stipulate that the Staffing and Oversight Review Subcommittee is to be provided with information obtained through the DCP's continuous quality review process in order to fulfill its obligations under the bill's provisions.

The committee amended the bill to make a technical correction to address a grammatical error.