

Committee on Children, Families, and Elder Affairs

CS/CS/HB 1435 — Child Welfare

by Health Care Appropriations Subcommittee; Children, Families and Seniors Subcommittee; and Rep. Perez and others (CS/CS/SB 590 by Appropriations Committee; Children, Families, and Elder Affairs Committee; and Senator Garcia and Campbell)

CS/CS/HB 1435 makes a number of changes designed to improve the use and support of relative and nonrelative caregivers for children removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect.

Subject to available resources, the bill authorizes the Department of Children and Families, certain county sheriff's offices, and community based care lead agencies to establish family finding programs. In some areas of the state, child abuse investigations are conducted by the sheriff. Family finding programs are to better identify relatives that may become caregivers for children of family members who are placed in out-of-home care. Community based care lead agencies are regional entities under contract with the Department of Children and Families to provide child welfare services.

Subject to available resources, the bill authorizes community based care lead agencies to establish a kinship navigator program to provide assistance to relatives and nonrelatives who are caring for children in out-of-home care. Such assistance may include providing eligibility and enrollment information for available benefits, relevant training, knowledge relating to custody options, help in finding legal services, and general outreach.

The bill requires the court to make a determination relating to a dependent child's enrollment in child care, early education, and preschool records for children under school age at each judicial hearing.

The bill clarifies a provision in the Rilya Wilson Act that requires children under school age who are in out-of-home care to continue enrollment in child care. Caregivers who stay home all day or work less than fulltime are not required to keep the child in child care. The bill also provides for educational stability and transitions in educational settings for children under school age.

If approved by the Governor, the bill has an effective date of July 1, 2018.

Vote: Senate 37-0; House 115-0