

Committee on Children, Families, and Elder Affairs

CS/SB 262 — Child Welfare

by Judiciary Committee and Senators Albritton, Harrell, Montford, and Rader

The bill revises the dependency process for abused children removed from their home to facilitate permanency within 1 year. Permanency for a dependent child can be reunification with parents, placement with a permanent guardian, such as a relative, or adoption. State law sets 1 year as a goal to achieve permanency. According to the Department of Children and Families, only 40% of dependent children in Florida reach their permanency goal within 1 year. To shorten the time children spend in dependency, the bill:

- Requires the court to name the Guardian ad Litem in the record;
- Directs caseworkers to provide updated contact information to parents;
- Limits court continuances to less than 60 days each year;
- Requires parents to give updated contact information to the caseworker and the court;
- Makes parents notify the court of any barriers to completing their case plan;
- Obligates case managers to make referrals to needed services for parents within 7 days after the case plan is approved;
- Requires the case plan to include strategies to overcome any barriers that would prevent the parents from completing any tasks;
- Orders the court to clearly inform parents that if they do not complete their case plan within 1 year, the court may terminate their parental rights; and
- Requires the court to provide a written order following a termination of parental rights within 30 days.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect October 1, 2019.

Vote: Senate 39-0; House 112-0