A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO CHILD WELFARE SERVICES.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:

SECTION 1. The legislature finds that the child welfare services branch of the department of human services is facing scrutiny over the branch's operations, including policies, procedures, and management. In a 2017 review conducted by the United States Administration for Children and Families, the child welfare services branch was found to have made no improvements from the previous evaluation conducted in 2009. The review further stated that the child welfare services branch only met five of the seven systematic factor categories, which were identical to the results in the 2009 evaluation.

The legislature further finds that there are other concerns about the child welfare services branch, including vacant positions within the agency, insufficient quality and frequency of caseworker visits, children remaining in foster care beyond fifteen months with no viable goal, and maltreatment allegations in pending cases not being formally investigated. Addressing these concerns will help the branch in effectively carrying out...
its mission to ensure the safety and permanency of children in their own homes or, when necessary, in out-of-home placements.

   The purpose of this Act is to establish a child welfare services task force to review the child welfare services branch and examine best practices that will help to improve child care safety through the branch.

   SECTION 2. (a) The department of human services shall establish a child welfare services task force to review the child welfare services branch and examine best practices that will help to improve child care safety through the branch. If a task force which addresses the child welfare services branch currently exists, the department shall combine the two task forces and their purposes together.

   (b) The following individuals shall serve as members of the task force:

       (1) The director of human services or the director's designee, who shall serve as chair of the task force;

       (2) The administrator of the child welfare services branch or the administrator's designee;
(3) A representative from the child care licensing program designated by the administrator of the benefit, employment and support services division;

(4) A representative from the department of the attorney general, to be designated by the attorney general;

(5) A representative from each of the county police departments in the State; and

(6) A representative from the United States Department of Defense Family Advocacy program.

(c) Task force members shall recommend additional members from the following stakeholder groups:

(1) Current or former foster youth;

(2) Resource caregivers;

(3) Biological parents of current or former foster youths;

and

(4) Frontline child welfare services branch social workers.

Task force members may recommend additional members with appropriate specialized expertise to the task force, to be approved by the chairperson.
In carrying out its duties, the task force shall:

(1) Request input from child welfare services branch workers for changes in the workplace, including systems changes, overtime, leadership training, and the establishment of an advisory committee where staff can interact with the administration of the branch;

(2) Seek more state matching funds to secure a greater amount of federal funding for improved training, worker recruitment and retention, additional positions within the child welfare services branch, assistance for family court working with the branch, ample opportunities to secure advanced degrees in the field of social work for branch workers, and support for the electronic system of the branch;

(3) Determine methods to improve worker recruitment and retention, including the hiring of university students in the school of social work and offering loan repayments; and

(4) Evaluate the child welfare services branch's investigations of child abuse and look at areas that
are in need of improvement that will allow for the
timely completion of future investigations.
(e) The task force shall submit a report of its findings
and recommendations, including any proposed legislation, to the
legislature no later than twenty days prior to the convening of
the regular session of 2020.
(f) The task force shall cease to exist on June 30, 2020.
SECTION 3. This Act shall take effect on January 1, 2059.
Report Title:
Child Welfare Services; Task Force

Description:
Establishes or merges with an existing task force a Child Welfare Services Task Force to review the Child Welfare Services Branch and examine best practices that will help to improve child care safety through the Branch. (HB383 HD1)

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