

# An Act

HOUSE BILL 17-1283

BY REPRESENTATIVE(S) Singer and Nordberg, Beckman, Covarrubias, Esgar, Herod, Kraft-Tharp, Landgraf, Lawrence, Liston, Lundeen, Michaelson Jenet, Navarro, Pabon, Rankin, Thurlow, Van Winkle, Williams D., Wist, Young, Becker K., Bridges, Carver, Catlin, Coleman, Danielson, Exum, Ginal, Gray, Hamner, Hansen, Hooton, Jackson, Kennedy, Lee, Lontine, McKean, McLachlan, Melton, Mitsch Bush, Pettersen, Rosenthal, Sias, Wilson, Winter, Duran;  
also SENATOR(S) Garcia and Cooke, Court, Aguilar, Fenberg, Jahn, Kefalas, Kerr, Martinez Humenik, Priola, Todd, Crowder, Fields, Hill, Jones, Merrifield, Moreno, Williams A.

CONCERNING THE CREATION OF A TASK FORCE TO EXAMINE WORKFORCE RESILIENCY IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM.

*Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Colorado:*

**SECTION 1. Legislative declaration.** (1) The general assembly finds and declares that:

(a) Child welfare caseworkers are regularly exposed to a heightened level of trauma and often exposed to children and families who suffer from violence, behavioral health challenges, or extreme poverty. As a result, many child welfare caseworkers experience what is known as "secondary

*Capital letters indicate new material added to existing statutes; dashes through words indicate deletions from existing statutes and such material not part of act.*

trauma".

(b) Secondary trauma is defined as indirect exposure to trauma through a firsthand account or narrative of a traumatic event. Experiencing secondary trauma is more severe than experiencing stress and often negatively impacts a person's ability to function. Symptoms of secondary trauma can include:

- (I) Distressing emotions;
- (II) Intrusive imagery;
- (III) Numbing or work avoidance;
- (IV) Addictive or compulsive behavior; and
- (V) Impairment of daily functioning.

(c) Working as a child welfare caseworker is difficult. Caseworkers work with a high degree of uncertainty and are responsible for life and death decisions concerning children and families. They are required to navigate a host of bureaucratic systems, manage demanding caseloads, and must, at all costs, preserve the safety and well-being of Colorado's most vulnerable children, youth, and families.

(d) The work environment for child welfare caseworkers can be physically and emotionally dangerous. Child welfare caseworkers enter the homes of involuntary clients and are expected to conduct a thorough safety assessment of both the parents and children. One state found that ninety percent of its child protective service employees had reported verbal threats, thirty percent had experienced physical attacks, and thirteen percent were threatened with weapons.

(e) The annual turnover rate for child welfare caseworkers ranges between twenty-three and sixty percent. The national average length of employment for child welfare caseworkers is less than two years.

(f) A recent study conducted in 2015 found that twenty-six to thirty-five percent of child welfare caseworkers in the study reported experiencing symptoms of secondary trauma directly related to their work.

Ongoing exposure to clients' stories and experiences of trauma ultimately affect a child welfare caseworker's vulnerability and sense of purpose. However, a child welfare caseworker's self-awareness of his or her own symptoms is typically low, despite the effects being troublesome and recognizable by colleagues or friends.

(g) Through the Colorado child welfare county workload study, Colorado has identified that its child welfare system is underfunded. In 2014, the study indicated there was a need for "an estimated 574 additional caseworker FTE positions . . . to handle the caseloads associated with time study participants."

(h) The National Child Welfare Workforce Institute has found that, on average, the cost for each child welfare caseworker leaving an agency is \$54,000. High turnover rates and staffing shortages leave the remaining child welfare caseworkers with insufficient time to conduct the types of home visits necessary to assess children's safety and to make decisions that ensure safe and permanent placements. Caseworker turnover disrupts the continuity of services, and cases are unintentionally left untended. Of particular concern, studies have shown a negative correlation between turnover and the length of time a child remains in the child welfare system.

(i) Currently, there are several working groups in Colorado that have identified that caseworker retention, recruitment, and resiliency in child welfare are of high priority. Several efforts are underway to improve in these areas. Different resiliency program models exist nationally, and some Colorado organizations are receiving federal dollars to implement such programs to specifically address secondary trauma and turnover among child welfare caseworkers.

(2) The general assembly therefore finds that it is in the best interest of the children and families of Colorado to establish a task force to examine workforce resiliency in the child welfare system. The purpose and goals of such task force are:

(a) To foster better collaboration and to eliminate duplicative efforts by serving as a forum to bring members from working groups together, along with child welfare caseworkers and parallel professionals, who have identified successful resiliency program models. Using these successful resiliency program models, the task force will provide insight and guidance

to counties who are interested in implementing a resiliency program that best fits their unique needs.

(b) To demonstrate Colorado's commitment to its child welfare workforce by applying for federal money or grants to support the implementation of one or more resiliency programs.

**SECTION 2.** In Colorado Revised Statutes, add 19-3-318 as follows:

**19-3-318. Study of child welfare caseworker resiliency programs - creation - membership - report - repeal.** (1) (a) A TASK FORCE TO IDENTIFY AND DEVELOP MODELS OF CHILD WELFARE CASEWORKER RESILIENCY PROGRAMS THAT MAY BE IMPLEMENTED IN VARIOUS COUNTIES THROUGHOUT THE STATE IS CREATED AND REFERRED TO IN THIS SECTION AS THE "TASK FORCE". THE TASK FORCE SHALL BASE ITS WORK AND FINDINGS ON NATIONAL MODELS OF RESILIENCY PROGRAMS AND REPORT ITS FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS PURSUANT TO SUBSECTION (5) OF THIS SECTION.

(b) FOR PURPOSES OF THIS SECTION, A "RESILIENCY PROGRAM" IS A TYPE OF PROGRAM THAT PROVIDES SUPPORTS FOR CHILD WELFARE CASEWORKERS WHO ARE EXPERIENCING SECONDARY TRAUMA. THE SUPPORTS MAY INCLUDE, BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO, PEER-TO-PEER PROGRAMS, MENTORING, AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES.

(2) (a) THE PURPOSE OF THE TASK FORCE IS TO BRING TOGETHER MEMBERS OF STATEWIDE WORKING GROUPS, CHILD WELFARE CASEWORKERS, AND PARALLEL PROFESSIONALS WHO HAVE IDENTIFIED SUCCESSFUL RESILIENCY PROGRAM MODELS. THE TASK FORCE SHALL USE SUCH MODELS TO PROVIDE INSIGHT AND GUIDANCE TO COLORADO COUNTIES THAT ARE INTERESTED IN IMPLEMENTING A RESILIENCY PROGRAM. THROUGH THE COMPILATION OF DATA AND STUDY OF NATIONAL RESILIENCY MODELS, COLORADO COUNTY DEPARTMENTS OF HUMAN AND SOCIAL SERVICES MAY CHOOSE IF, AND HOW, THEY WOULD LIKE TO INCORPORATE THE MODELS, DATA, AND RESOURCES TO BEST FIT UNIQUE COUNTY NEEDS.

(b) THE TASK FORCE SHALL CREATE A DATABASE OF STATEWIDE RESOURCES THAT WILL BE AVAILABLE TO ANY INTERESTED COUNTY. PARTICIPATING COUNTIES MAY UTILIZE DATA COMPILED BY THE TASK FORCE TO IDENTIFY RESOURCES THAT ARE AVAILABLE TO THEM AND HOW THEY CAN

UTILIZE SUCH RESOURCES TO IMPLEMENT A RESILIENCY PROGRAM THAT BEST FITS THE UNIQUE COUNTY NEEDS OF ITS CHILD WELFARE WORKFORCE.

(c) INTENDED OUTCOMES OF THE TASK FORCE INCLUDE DEMONSTRATING COLORADO'S COMMITMENT TO ITS CHILD WELFARE WORKFORCE AND EXPLORING COLORADO'S OPPORTUNITIES TO APPLY FOR FEDERAL OR PRIVATE GRANTS TO SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COUNTY-LEVEL RESILIENCY PROGRAMS.

(3) THE TASK FORCE MUST NOT EXCEED SIXTEEN MEMBERS. THE APPOINTING AUTHORITIES SHALL MAKE THEIR INITIAL APPOINTMENTS TO THE TASK FORCE ON OR BEFORE JULY 1, 2017. EACH MEMBER OF THE TASK FORCE WHO IS APPOINTED PURSUANT TO THIS SUBSECTION (3) SERVES AT THE PLEASURE OF THE AUTHORITY WHO APPOINTED THAT MEMBER. THE TASK FORCE CONSISTS OF THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS:

(a) THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES, OR HIS OR HER DESIGNEE;

(b) THE CHAIRPERSON OF METROPOLITAN STATE UNIVERSITY OF DENVER'S DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK, OR HIS OR HER DESIGNEE;

(c) TWO PERSONS REPRESENTING LARGE COUNTY DEPARTMENTS OF HUMAN OR SOCIAL SERVICES, AS IDENTIFIED BY A STATEWIDE COALITION OF COUNTY DEPARTMENTS OF HUMAN OR SOCIAL SERVICES, WHO ARE APPOINTED BY THE DIRECTOR OF EACH SUCH COUNTY DEPARTMENT;

(d) TWO PERSONS REPRESENTING MID-SIZED COUNTY DEPARTMENTS OF HUMAN OR SOCIAL SERVICES, AS IDENTIFIED BY A STATEWIDE COALITION OF COUNTY DEPARTMENTS OF HUMAN OR SOCIAL SERVICES, WHO ARE APPOINTED BY THE DIRECTOR OF EACH SUCH COUNTY DEPARTMENT;

(e) TWO PERSONS REPRESENTING SMALL OR RURAL COUNTIES, AS IDENTIFIED BY A STATEWIDE COALITION OF COUNTY DEPARTMENTS OF HUMAN OR SOCIAL SERVICES, WHO ARE APPOINTED BY THE DIRECTOR OF EACH SUCH COUNTY DEPARTMENT;

(f) THREE MEMBERS WHO ARE CURRENT CHILD WELFARE CASEWORKERS, WHO ARE APPOINTED BY A STATEWIDE ASSOCIATION OF HUMAN SERVICES DIRECTORS;

(g) THE DIRECTOR OF A COLORADO CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTER, OR HIS OR HER DESIGNEE, WHO HAS EXPERIENCE IN INTERVIEWING CHILDREN WHO HAVE BEEN ABUSED OR NEGLECTED;

(h) AN INDIVIDUAL WITH EXPERIENCE IN LAW ENFORCEMENT WHO HAS PARTICIPATED IN A RESILIENCY PROGRAM WITHIN A LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY, WHO IS APPOINTED BY THE PRESIDENT OF A STATEWIDE ORGANIZATION OF POLICE OFFICERS;

(i) AN INDIVIDUAL REPRESENTING A STATEWIDE ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORK WHO HAS EXPERIENCE AS A CHILD WELFARE CASEWORKER;

(j) AN INDIVIDUAL WHO IS TRAINED THROUGH THE OFFICE FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER AS A FACILITATOR IN BUILDING RESILIENCY IN CHILD WELFARE ORGANIZATIONS, WHO IS APPOINTED BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER FOR TRAUMA AND RESILIENCE; AND

(k) AN INDIVIDUAL WHO REPRESENTS THE STATE'S CHILD WELFARE TRAINING ACADEMY CREATED IN SECTION 26-5-109, WHO IS APPOINTED BY THE DIRECTOR OF THE ACADEMY.

(4) THE CHAIRPERSON OF METROPOLITAN STATE UNIVERSITY OF DENVER, OR HIS OR HER DESIGNEE, SHALL CONVENE THE FIRST MEETING OF THE TASK FORCE ON OR BEFORE AUGUST 1, 2017. THE MEMBERS OF THE TASK FORCE SERVE WITHOUT COMPENSATION OR REIMBURSEMENT FOR EXPENSES.

(5) ON OR BEFORE DECEMBER 31, 2017, AND IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS OF SECTION 24-1-136 (9), THE TASK FORCE SHALL SUBMIT A WRITTEN REPORT TO THE JOINT BUDGET COMMITTEE AND THE JOINT HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE. THE REPORT MUST INCLUDE:

(a) A SUMMARY OF WORK COMPLETED BY THE TASK FORCE;

(b) ANY BEST PRACTICES OR GUIDELINES FOR COUNTIES IDENTIFIED BY THE TASK FORCE; AND

(c) ANY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE LEGISLATION TO SUPPORT

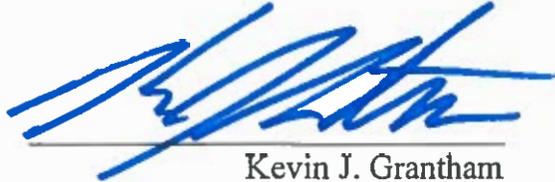
COUNTY-LEVEL RESILIENCY PROGRAMS.

(6) THIS SECTION IS REPEALED, EFFECTIVE SEPTEMBER 1, 2018.

**SECTION 3. Safety clause.** The general assembly hereby finds, determines, and declares that this act is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, and safety.



Crisanta Duran  
SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE  
OF REPRESENTATIVES



Kevin J. Grantham  
PRESIDENT OF  
THE SENATE



Marilyn Eddins  
CHIEF CLERK OF THE HOUSE  
OF REPRESENTATIVES

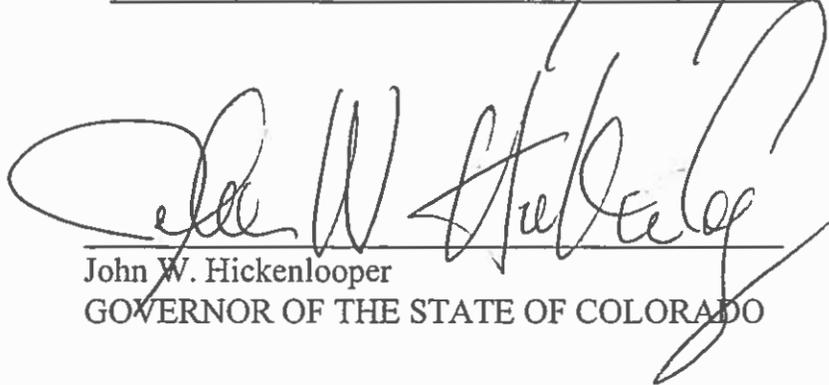


Effie Ameen  
SECRETARY OF  
THE SENATE

APPROVED

3:51 PM

5/22/17



John W. Hickenlooper  
GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF COLORADO