

**First Regular Session  
Seventy-first General Assembly  
STATE OF COLORADO**

**INTRODUCED**

LLS NO. 17-0609.02 Jane Ritter x4342

**HOUSE BILL 17-1283**

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**A BILL FOR AN ACT**

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

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**Bill Summary**

*(Note: This summary applies to this bill as introduced and does not reflect any amendments that may be subsequently adopted. If this bill passes third reading in the house of introduction, a bill summary that applies to the reengrossed version of this bill will be available at <http://leg.colorado.gov>.)*

The bill creates a task force to organize county-level versions of and guidelines for child welfare caseworker resiliency programs (task force) modeled on national resiliency programs. The membership of the task force is outlined, along with its duties and reporting requirements.

The task force is repealed, effective September 1, 2018.

Shading denotes HOUSE amendment. Double underlining denotes SENATE amendment.  
*Capital letters indicate new material to be added to existing statute.*  
*Dashes through the words indicate deletions from existing statute.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

25           (d) The work environment for child welfare caseworkers can be  
26 physically and emotionally dangerous. Child welfare caseworkers enter

1 the homes of involuntary clients and are expected to conduct a thorough  
2 safety assessment of both the parents and children. One state found that  
3 ninety percent of its child protective service employees had reported  
4 verbal threats, thirty percent had experienced physical attacks, and  
5 thirteen percent were threatened with weapons.

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

9 (f) A recent study conducted in 2015 found that twenty-six to  
10 thirty-five percent of child welfare caseworkers in the study reported  
11 experiencing symptoms of secondary trauma directly related to their  
12 work. Ongoing exposure to clients' stories and experiences of trauma  
13 ultimately affect a child welfare caseworker's vulnerability and sense of  
14 purpose. However, a child welfare caseworker's self-awareness of his or  
15 her own symptoms is typically low, despite the effects being troublesome  
16 and recognizable by colleagues or friends.

17 (g) Through the Colorado child welfare county workload study,  
18 Colorado has identified that its child welfare system is underfunded. In  
19 2014, the study indicated there was a need for "an estimated 574  
20 additional caseworker FTE positions . . . to handle the caseloads  
21 associated with time study participants."

22 (h) The National Child Welfare Workforce Institute has found  
23 that, on average, the cost for each child welfare caseworker leaving an  
24 agency is \$54,000. High turnover rates and staffing shortages leave the  
25 remaining child welfare caseworkers with insufficient time to conduct the  
26 types of home visits necessary to assess children's safety and to make  
27 decisions that ensure safe and permanent placements. Caseworker

1 turnover disrupts the continuity of services, and cases are unintentionally  
2 left untended. Of particular concern, studies have shown a negative  
3 correlation between turnover and the length of time a child remains in the  
4 child welfare system.

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

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

16 (a) To foster better collaboration and to eliminate duplicative  
17 efforts by serving as a forum to bring members from working groups  
18 together, along with child welfare caseworkers and parallel professionals,  
19 who have identified successful resiliency program models. Using these  
20 successful resiliency program models, the task force will provide insight  
21 and guidance to counties who are interested in implementing a resiliency  
22 program that best fits their unique needs.

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

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

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

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

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

26           (b) THE TASK FORCE SHALL CREATE A DATABASE OF STATEWIDE  
27 RESOURCES THAT WILL BE AVAILABLE TO ANY INTERESTED COUNTY.

1 PARTICIPATING COUNTIES MAY UTILIZE DATA COMPILED BY THE TASK  
2 FORCE TO IDENTIFY RESOURCES THAT ARE AVAILABLE TO THEM AND HOW  
3 THEY CAN UTILIZE SUCH RESOURCES TO IMPLEMENT A RESILIENCY  
4 PROGRAM THAT BEST FITS THE UNIQUE COUNTY NEEDS OF ITS CHILD  
5 WELFARE WORKFORCE.

6 (c) AN INTENDED OUTCOME OF THE TASK FORCE IS TO  
7 DEMONSTRATE COLORADO'S COMMITMENT TO ITS CHILD WELFARE  
8 WORKFORCE, ALLOWING COLORADO TO APPLY FOR FEDERAL MONEY OR  
9 GRANTS TO SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COUNTY-LEVEL RESILIENCY  
10 PROGRAMS.

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

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

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

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

26 (d) TWO PERSONS REPRESENTING MID-SIZED COUNTY  
27 DEPARTMENTS OF HUMAN OR SOCIAL SERVICES, AS IDENTIFIED BY A

1 STATEWIDE COALITION OF COUNTY DEPARTMENTS OF HUMAN OR SOCIAL  
2 SERVICES, WHO ARE APPOINTED BY THE DIRECTOR OF EACH SUCH COUNTY  
3 DEPARTMENT;

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 THE DIRECTOR OF THE ACADEMY.

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

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

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

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

15 (c) ANY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE LEGISLATION TO  
16 SUPPORT COUNTY-LEVEL RESILIENCY PROGRAMS.

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

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