



Human Services

During the 2019 legislative session, the General Assembly passed legislation focused on enhancing the state's adoption, foster care, and child welfare programs; expanding a Division of Youth Services (DYS) pilot program designed to change the internal culture of DHS; and enhancing services available to persons with disabilities who are applying for federal disability benefits.

Adoption and Foster Care

The Office of Colorado's Child Protection Ombudsman's (Ombudsman) 2017 *Investigation Report Case 2016-2074* makes several recommendations on how to improve the Adoption Assistance Program administered by the Colorado Department of Human Services (DHS). The program allows DHS, or a county department of human services, to enter into an adoption assistance agreement with an adoptive parent to provide benefits to an adoptive parent who adopts a child who meets the medical and disability requirements for federal supplemental security income (SSI) or has special needs that create a barrier to his or her adoption. Benefits may include a monthly subsidy payment; medical assistance; reimbursement for nonrecurring expenses incurred in connection with adoption; and payment or reimbursement for other services or benefits.

The Ombudsman's report suggests that the program's funding structure needs to be

updated; the administration of the program should be standardized across counties; and the post-adoption services provided to families need to be enhanced to include services that are necessary to ensure stability for the child and the adoptive family. *Senate Bill 19-178* addresses these concerns. The bill repeals and reenacts the existing Adoption Assistance Program to codify rules and make modifications. The bill sets standards for DHS, county departments of human services, and nonprofit placement agencies to follow when working with adoptive families, including standards for the following:

- notifying adoptive parents of the services available to them and the child;
- negotiating adoptive assistance agreements and reviewing agreements; and
- DHS program reporting requirements.

The Foster Youth Sibling Bill of Rights created by *House Bill 19-1288* focuses on allowing youth placed in foster care to continue relationships with their siblings and establishes several rights for these siblings, unless the rights are not in the best interest of one of the siblings. Some of the rights listed in bill include the right to:

- placement in a foster care home with siblings;
- placement in close geographical distance to siblings;
- obtain temporary respite placements together, when possible;

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- be notified about changes in sibling placement or catastrophic events;
- be involved in each other's lives and share celebrations;
- annually receive contact information for all siblings;
- be provided an explanation if contact with a sibling is restricted or denied; and
- have contact with siblings in any adoptive or guardianship placement.

In addition, the bill allows an adult sibling of a youth in foster care to have the right to be considered as a foster care provider, adoptive parent, and relative custodian to his or her sibling.

Child Welfare

House Bill 19-1308 updates current state statute to comply with the federal Family First Prevention Services Act. The bill allows Colorado to provide enhanced foster care prevention service to children, youth, and their families in order to prevent foster care placements. Foster care prevention services include mental health and substance abuse prevention and treatment services; in-home parent skill-based programs; and kinship navigator programs. These services are available to children, their parents, or caregivers when their needs for services are directly related to the safety, permanent placement, or well being of the child, or to prevent the child from entering the foster care system.

House Bill 19-1133 creates the Colorado Child Abuse Response and Evaluation Network (CARENnetwork) in the Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE). The CARENnetwork is created to support the provision of medical exams and behavioral health assessments to children age 5 and under in suspected cases of physical or sexual abuse

or neglect, and children under 13 years of age in suspected cases of sexual abuse. In creating the CARENnetwork, CDPHE must coordinate with DHS, existing advisory committees, and interested stakeholders to align with other state and local efforts focused on preventing child abuse and neglect and addressing the health and social needs of families at risk of experiencing child abuse or neglect.

Division of Youth Services

Under current law, the DYS must provide treatment to at least 20 committed youth through a pilot program designed to aid in establishing a division-wide therapeutic and rehabilitative culture. *Senate Bill 19-136* expands the pilot program by adding a second pilot program location and increasing the number of committed youth served to 35. The program provides therapeutic care in a home-like environment to youth committed to the DYS.

Persons with Disabilities

House Bill 19-1223 creates a new program to help individuals with disabilities apply for federal social security disability benefits. The program is funded through and overseen by DHS and administered by county departments of human services.