



Friends of Children

245 Russell Street, #22

Hadley, MA 01035

413.586.0011

www.friendsofchildreninc.org

An Act Establishing the Massachusetts Foster Care Review Office (SD1566/HD1572)

Filed by: Senator Lovely, Representative Farley-Bouvier and Representative Vega

What Is Foster Care Review?

States receiving federal funds are required to have a "foster care review system" to provide oversight and ensure each child/youth/young adult's permanency plan is reviewed at least every six months. The review focuses on the permanency plan, the safety and appropriateness of placement and parental and provider compliance with plan tasks. Other states have various structures for foster care review, however, the most effective are independent of the state's child welfare organization.

Why Is This Legislation Needed?

In Massachusetts, foster care review is housed in The Department of Children and Families (DCF), it is an internal DCF department. This structure creates challenges and potential conflicts of interest for ensuring a robust and independent review with transparency, accountability, oversight and real authority to enforce findings and recommendations. A truly independent review process addresses these challenges both at the individual case level and at the systems level.

What does it do?

- This legislation removes the responsibility for foster care review from DCF, transfers it to an external and independent body, the Foster Care Review Office (FCRO) and mandates the authority required to ensure foster care review determinations and recommendations are implemented and followed-up;
- Establishes a FCRO governing Board, appointed by a majority vote of the Governor, Attorney General and Auditor, to hire and fire the Executive Director and support and facilitate the work of the FCRO;
- Establishes a FCRO Interdisciplinary Council to address and resolve case specific and systemic issues impacting progress toward permanency and services focused on the best interest of the child/youth/young adult in foster care placement brought to the Council's attention by the FCRO Executive Director in monthly meetings; and
- Mandates, at a minimum, annual reports to the Legislature, Governor, Secretary EOHHS, DCF, Office of the Child Advocate, Chief Justices of the Juvenile and the Probate and Family Courts and the Public. The report will include, but is not limited to, the activities of the FCRO, statistics and analysis of aggregate data from the foster care reviews regarding strengths, issues, policy concerns and problems which have come to the attention of the FCRO from analysis of the aggregate data. The Executive Director shall make recommendations to address the issues, concerns and problems identified.