

SB 279 A STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

House Committee On Human Services

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Meeting Dates: 5/17, 5/19

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Requires Department of Human Services (DHS) to avoid causing children in foster care to miss school to attend scheduled visitations with parents, to the extent practicable. Directs DHS to ensure its records of absences are accurate if a child misses more than part or all of four days per semester due to scheduled visitations. Directs DHS to collect information on visitation absences and share it with the legislature every semester of the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school years. Describes minimum information to include the number, age, and grade level of children absent due to visitation, and the most common reason why visitations were not scheduled outside school hours. Requires DHS to report to the legislature by September 1, 2022, as specified. Sunsets reporting requirements January, 1 2024. Declares emergency, effective on passage.

Fiscal: Has minimal fiscal impact

Revenue: No revenue impact

Senate Committee On Human Services, Mental Health and Recovery: Do pass with amendments unanimously.

Senate: Passed. Ayes, 28; Excused, 2--Heard, Kennemer.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

Frequent absences from school can result in less instruction overall but also an inability to build on previous instruction, as well as lost opportunities for social interaction and enrichment. Absences from elementary school in particular can impact basic skills and compound a child's difficulty and fear as they fall behind. Foster youth already experience increased barriers to success generally, as compared to peers outside the child welfare system. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, a best practice that supports foster children and youth with regularly scheduled visits with their parents, is to avoid disrupting the child's or youth's routine by not scheduling such visits during school hours or after-school activities, or late at night.

Senate Bill 279 A requires the Department of Human Services (DHS) to avoid causing children in foster care to miss school in order to make appointments for parental visits, to the extent practicable, and to collect information about such absences and report to the legislature.