

SB 279 A STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY**Carrier:** Sen. Gelser**Senate Committee On Human Services, Mental Health and Recovery****Action Date:** 04/13/21**Action:** Do pass with amendments. (Printed A-Eng.)**Vote:** 5-0-0-0**Yeas:** 5 - Anderson, Gelser, Lieber, Robinson, Taylor**Fiscal:** Has minimal fiscal impact**Revenue:** No revenue impact**Prepared By:** C. Ross, Counsel**Meeting Dates:** 2/23, 4/13**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.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Prioritizing childhood; prioritizing a child's schedule and education to the extent possible, the same as or over adults' schedules
- Particular concern for academic success of young children
- Foster youth with regular parental visits during school hours, that would otherwise be considered unexcused or chronically absent
- Provisions of amendment to exclude medical appointments, court dates; intent to apply generally to visits with parents

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

Removes reference to appointments generally, to narrow applicability to scheduled visitations with parents. Directs DHS to ensure its records of absences are accurate if a child misses more than part or all of four days per semester. Directs DHS to collect information on foster child 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 (on a graduated basis based on number of absences, starting at all or part of five days absent, to more than all or part of 15 days absent), 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. Defines terms. Sunsets reporting requirements January, 1 2024.

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.

SB 279 A STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

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.