

Act No. 60 (S.9). Human services; child protection

An act relating to improving Vermont's system for protecting children from abuse and neglect

This act improves the State's approach to preventing child abuse and neglect, and protecting children from abuse. The act includes sections:

- Modifying the definitions of key terms, such as “risk of harm,” and “sexual abuse” in Title 33 to be more inclusive and consistent, and adding the definition of “serious physical injury”;
- Amending the “mandated reporter” statute, 33 V.S.A. § 4913, to change the reporting threshold from “reasonable cause to believe” to “reasonably suspects,” requiring that mandated reporters personally report abuse and neglect, and clarifying that this must be done within 24 hours of first observing or receiving information about the abuse or neglect;
- Encouraging information sharing among the various professionals dealing with an abused or neglected child;
- Replacing the rigid custody hierarchy in 33 V.S.A. § 5308 with a “best interests” standard and a shorter, and less rigid, list of custody options for courts to consider;
- Allowing legally enforceable post-adoption contact agreements between adoptive and birth parents for children in DCF custody;
- Clarifying the jurisdiction of Special Investigations Units and what allegations DCF must report to law enforcement;
- Amending 13 V.S.A. § 1304 (cruelty to a child) to provide for an enhanced sentence if a child is killed, or suffers serious bodily injury or sexual assault;
- Establishing a legislative oversight committee that will sunset in 2018;
- Establishing a Working Group to recommend improvements to CHINS proceedings.

Multiple effective dates, beginning on June 15, 2015 (DCF policies and procedures, legislative oversight committee, and CHINS working group). Rest of act is effective on July 1, 2015.