

H.325

An act relating to a bill of rights for children of arrested and incarcerated parents

It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

Sec. 1. LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS

(a) Children of incarcerated parents have committed no crime, yet they pay a steep penalty. They often forfeit their homes, their safety, their public status and private self-image, and their primary source of comfort and affection.

(b) The General Assembly and the State have a strong interest in assuring that children of incarcerated parents are provided with the services and support necessary to thrive despite the hardship they face due to their parent's status.

Sec. 2. REPORT

(a) The Secretary of Human Services shall study and develop recommendations, within the Integrated Family Services Initiative (IFS), on the following issues:

(1) the capacity needed to serve children and their families or caregivers within the Integrated Family Services Initiative;

(2) existing services available to children with incarcerated parents and the need for additional services to:

(A) build and maintain healthy relationships between children and incarcerated parents, including parent-child visits, parenting classes, and supervised visits;

(B) develop child- and family-centered tools or strategies that can be used throughout the criminal justice system to mitigate unintended consequences on children; and

(C) support children and their families or caregivers by including the use of Family Impact Statements in the Court process;

(3) appropriate physical settings for children to visit incarcerated parents and services while the parent is incarcerated;

(4) a mechanism to ensure that coordinated services are provided to children of incarcerated parents by the Department for Children and Families and the Department of Corrections;

(5) agency data systems to track and coordinate services for children of incarcerated parents; and

(6) the cost of services necessary to implement a comprehensive system of care addressing the unique needs of children of incarcerated parents.

(b) In developing recommendations as required by this act, the Secretary shall consult stakeholders, including:

(1) the Department of Corrections;

(2) the Department for Children and Families;

(3) the Department of Mental Health;

(4) the Prisoners' Rights Office;

(5) the LUND Family Center; and

(6) the Parent Child Center Network.

(c) The Secretary shall consider the Inmate Family Survey Project and its recommendations for best practices.

(d) On or before January 15, 2015, the Secretary shall submit a report and recommendations to the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare, Senate Committee on Institutions, House Committee on Human Services, and House Committee on Corrections and Institutions.

Sec. 3. EFFECTIVE DATE

This act shall take effect on passage.