

Vermont Legislative Joint Fiscal Office

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FISCAL NOTE

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H.522 Office of The Child Protection Ombudsman (draft version #3)

This creates a new Office of the Child Protection Ombudsman within the Agency of Administration. This Ombudsman will be appointed by the Governor for a term of four years or until a successor is appointed. The bill lists the functions and duties of the office which include among other issues related to the protection of children: investigating and resolving complaints, training persons and organizations, and developing and issuing annual reports.

Sec. 3 specifies that two positions and funding from within the Department for Children and Families (DCF) be transferred for the purposes of establishing the Office of the Child Protection Ombudsman. The estimated range of salary for the Ombudsman is \$67,000 to \$103,000 with a mid-range of \$85,000. The additional cost for FICA and benefits including retirement are estimated at 40% bringing the mid-range position cost to \$119,000. The second administrative position is estimated to have a salary in the range of \$35,000 to \$44,000 with a mid-range cost of \$39,500 which fully loaded with benefits totals \$55,300. The total impact to the DCF budget is a transfer of \$174,300 to the Agency of Administration.

It is not clear at this time which programs within DCF will be impacted by the transfer of these funds. The section requires the transfer of these funds, but does not preclude DCF from seeking the backfilling of the funds in future budget requests. It is assumed that grant funding for this position will be limited and all or the majority of the transferred funds will be state General Fund and could impact DCF programs to a greater degree if the transfer reduces match and thereby reducing federal grants that can be drawn.

In addition to the transfer that funds the positions, an appropriation of \$25,000 will be needed to cover office operating expenses including: in state travel, finance, DII and HR charges and miscellaneous expenses. It is assumed that there will not be any additional cost for space and the office can be accommodated within the Secretary of Administration existing space allocation.

While this office is established from transferred and appears to have no immediate FY17 budgetary impact beyond the ultimate source of the transfer within DCF, the cost of the office may grow over time as the office and its functions mature. The caseload of complaints of persons involved in the child protection system is unknown and likely to be highly variable year to year and it is unclear how this new office may impact the current practice and operations in AHS or other agencies and departments of the state.