

S.9 (as introduced)

Sen. Health & Welfare Feb. 10, 2015

Sen. Ayer's proposed new section to create a "Legislative Task Force to Strengthen Families."

Sec. ____: STRENGTHENING FAMILIES TASK FORCE

(a) A task force shall be created to examine how the child welfare system provides effective supports to the families who come to the attention of the Department for Children and Families, Family Services Division (DCF). The task force shall examine how DCF has implemented differential response as an effective service to fulfill their purpose to protect and promote the welfare of children, including the strengthening of their homes where possible. The task force will make recommendations for improvements, including reallocation of funding and for creating a structure for results-based accountability and oversight for the effectiveness of services to restore and improve family well-being. The task force shall be called the "Strengthening Families Task Force."

(b) The Task Force member shall include:

- (1) A member of the Senate, to be appointed by the Committee on Committees;
- (2) A member of the House of Representatives to be appointed by the Speaker of the House;
- (3) The Executive Director of the Voices for Vermont's Children or designee who shall serve as chair;
- (4) The Executive Director of Vermont Network against Domestic & Sexual Violence or designee;
- (5) A representative of the Vermont Parent Child Center Network;
- (6) The Executive Director of the Vermont Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health or designee;
- (7) A representative of K.I.N.-K.A.N. Vermont of Kinship Information and Navigation networks and Kinship Advocacy Network;
- (8) A representative of the Vermont Recovery Network;
- (9) The Commissioner of Mental Health or designee from family support services of a designated mental health agency or private mental health agency such as Easter Seals;
- (10) The Adjutant and Inspector General of the Vermont National Guard or designee from the Family Assistance Center of the National Guard;
- (11) The Executive Director of a shelter for homeless families such as The Upper Valley Haven in White River Junction or Morningside Shelter in Brattleboro;
- (12) The Executive Director of the Vermont Family Network or designee;
- (13) The Executive Director of the Vermont Parent Representation Center or designee;
- (14) The Commissioner for Children and Families or designee;
- (15) Two parent consumers previously involved with the child protection system;
- (16) A representative from the business community;

(c) For attendance at a meeting when the General Assembly is not in session, legislative members of the Task Force shall be entitled to compensation for services and reimbursement of expenses as provided under 2 V.S.A. § 406(a).

(d) The Task Force created under this section shall:

(1) Review existing law, policies and procedures related to strengthening families involved in the child welfare system.

(2) Review the implementation of differential response (DR) under 33 V.S.A. § 4915, including how DCF implemented the law, the number of investigations and assessments, how DCF trained its staff in implementation to support the family in building community relationships, what protocols have been established to ensure that DR is approached in a manner that is driven by the family (family centered), strengths based, solution focused, supportive, and trust building, and how assessments are conducted and approached differently by DCF staff from investigations.

(3) Review how a public/private partnership with a network of community-based organizations has been developed and used from the beginning of DCF involvement in the different regions of Vermont within the context of community resources, poverty rates, employment rates, and health care to provide a network of family supports which is responsive to the needs in each geographic region and which clearly articulates the roles and responsibilities of State and community partners.

(4) Review how a network of volunteers and peer partners has been built to provide support for the affected families.

(5) Make recommendations to the Administration and General Assembly for reallocation of resources and changes in the law and policies as necessary to implement evidence-based practices where families feel supported and valued.

(6) Make recommendations to the Administration and General Assembly for the creation of a robust structure for results accountability and oversight to evaluate the ongoing effectiveness of services to restore and improve family well-being.

(7) Report its findings and recommendation on an annual basis on or before January 15, to the ????

Questions and decisions for Committee:

- Overlap with the jurisdiction of joint oversight committee;
- Differential response not an issue S.9 addresses;
- Support and resources to task force; and
- Task force permanent or limited term?