H.714


Referred to Committee on

Date:

Subject: Human services; health care; Judiciary; corrections; youth and child voices

Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to create the two-year Child and Youth Representation Policy Fellowship Program and a related fellowship position to engage in a multitiered initiative to bolster child and youth voices in Vermont, including within its legal, health care, and
human services systems, in ways that incorporate racially and socially
equitable approaches while ensuring the safety of the children and youth whose
voices are bolstered. The Fellowship Program requires periodic status reports
to various legislative committees culminating in proposed legislation
incorporating the results of the Program’s examination.

An act relating to bolstering child and youth voices in Vermont

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

Sec. 1. OFFICE OF CHILD, YOUTH, AND FAMILY ADVOCATE;

FELLOWSHIP; POSITION; APPROPRIATION

(a) Fellowship Program. The Office of Child, Youth, and Family Advocate
shall create the two-year Child and Youth Representation Policy Fellowship
Program to engage in a multilayered initiative to bolster child and youth voices
in Vermont, including within its legal, health care, and human services
systems, in ways that incorporate racially and socially equitable approaches
while ensuring the safety of the children and youth whose voices are bolstered.
This multilayered initiative shall include an analysis of the State’s child and
youth legal representation system, guardian-ad-litem programs, supervised
visitation structure, and funding mechanisms.

(1) On or before December 15, 2024, the Office of Child, Youth, and
Family Advocate shall report to the Joint Legislative Justice Oversight
Committee on the status of the Fellowship Program and any progress made in achieving its objectives.

(2) On or before May 15, 2025, the Office of Child, Youth, and Family Advocate shall report to the Senate Committees on Health and Welfare and on Judiciary and the House Committees on Health Care, on Human Services, on Judiciary, and on Corrections and Institutions concerning any progress made in achieving its objectives.

(3) On or before November 15, 2025, the Office of Child, Youth, and Family Advocate shall submit proposed legislation to the Joint Legislative Justice Oversight Committee and the Office of the Governor that incorporates any recommended changes to Vermont's legal, health care, and human services systems, including necessary appropriations to support such changes.

(b) Position. On July 1, 2024, a new, full-time, temporary, Child and Youth Representation Policy Lead position is created in the Office of Child, Youth, and Family Advocate as part of the Fellowship Program established pursuant to subsection (a) of this section. The Child and Youth Representation Policy Lead position is established to spearhead a holistic examination of Vermont's child and youth representation system pursuant to subsection (a) of this section. In addition to any other duties deemed appropriate by the Office, the Policy Lead position shall direct the Office's public information process concerning the Fellowship Program and convene stakeholders engaged in
youth advocacy issues in Vermont’s communities, legal system, and State
entities to address and implement any statewide systems improvement
necessary to achieve the Fellowship Program’s objectives.

(c) Appropriation. The sum of $300,000.00 is appropriated from the
Tobacco Litigation Settlement Fund to the Office of Child, Youth, and Family
Advocate in fiscal year 2025 to support the Child and Youth Representation
Policy Fellowship Program established pursuant to subsection (a) of this
section. This appropriation shall also be used to fund the Policy Lead position
established pursuant to subsection (b) of this section. Any remaining funds
shall carry forward to fiscal year 2026 for the uses outlined in this section.

Sec. 2. EFFECTIVE DATE

This act shall take effect on July 1, 2024.