

SUBJECT: Adoption assistance incentives for placing hard-to-place children

COMMITTEE: Juvenile Justice and Family Issues— favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 9 ayes — Goodman, Staples, J. Jones, McClendon, McReynolds, Naishtat, A. Reyna, Smith, Williams

0 nays

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, April 8 — voice vote

WITNESSES: None

BACKGROUND : The Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (DPRS) currently administers a program designed to promote the adoption of children who cannot be placed with appropriate adoptive parents without the provision of adoption assistance because of factors including ethnic background, age, membership in a minority or sibling group, the presence of a medical condition, or a physical, mental or emotional disability. Licensed child placing agencies often assist the DPRS to find permanent adoptive homes for these hard-to-place children.

DIGEST: SB 670 would require the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (DPRS) to pay a monetary incentive, subject to the availability of funds, to a licensed child-placing agency that assisted in the completed adoption of a child receiving or entitled to receive foster care at DPRS expense. The incentive could only be paid for cases involving children that could not be placed with appropriate adoptive parents without the provision of adoption assistance.

The incentive would have to equal 25 percent of the amount the DPRS would have spent to provide one year of foster care for the child, determined according to the child's level of care at the time the adoption was completed. An adoption would be completed when the court issues the adoption order.

SB 670 would take effect September 1, 1997, and would apply to an adoption that becomes final on or after the effective date.

SUPPORTERS SAY: SB 670 would help decrease the extended delays in adoption experienced by many Texas children in foster care. Statistics for fiscal years 1991-1995 show that children spent an average of 40.8 months in the state system before being adopted. For children, such delay seems like a lifetime and can be extremely detrimental to healthy emotional development. A loving stable environment is vital to raising healthy productive children, and all Texas children deserve such an environment.

It would authorize DPRS to pay an incentive to a licensed child-placing agency that successfully assisted in the completed adoption of a hard-to-place child in DPRS care. In addition to helping children, the bill would also be good fiscal policy for Texas because the incentive that DPRS would provide would be subject to the availability of funding and would only be one-fourth of what it costs the DPRS to provide a child with care for one year.

Adding a performance-based incentive to the minimal level of compensation that DPRS currently offers to child-placing agencies would encourage adoptions of hard-to-place children and thereby benefit both those children and the state. Performance-based incentives are appropriate in cases involving children that are hard to place, but are not necessary for all of the children under DPRS' care.

OPPONENTS SAY: The DPRS already provides compensation to the private child-placing agencies with which it contracts, so additional incentives should not be necessary.

OTHER OPPONENTS SAY: If it is a good idea to provide additional monetary incentives to private child-placing agencies based on their performance, then perhaps all DPRS payments to private child-placing agencies should be performance based.

NOTES: Rep. Staples plans to offer a floor amendment to limit incentives to 25 percent or less of the annual cost of a child's foster care.

