WEST virginia legislature

2021 regular session

Introduced

House Bill 2054

By Delegate McGeehan

[Introduced February 10, 2021; Referred to the Committee on the Judiciary]

A BILL to amend and reenact §49-4-712 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended; and to amend said code by adding thereto a new section, designated §49-4-712a, all relating to requiring parents or guardians to participate in programs for juveniles in an out-of-home placement.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

ARTICLE 4. COURT ACTIONS.

§49-4-712. Intervention and services by the department pursuant to initial disposition for status offenders; enforcement; further disposition; detention; out-of-home placement; department custody; least restrictive alternative; appeal; prohibiting placement of status offenders in a Division of Juvenile Services facility on or after January 1, 2016.

(a) The services provided by the department for juveniles adjudicated as status offenders shall be consistent with part 10 §49*-2-1001 et seq.* of this code and shall be designed to develop skills and supports within families and to resolve problems related to the juveniles or conflicts within their families. Services may include, but are not limited to, referral of juveniles and parents, guardians or custodians and other family members to services for psychiatric or other medical care, or psychological, welfare, legal, educational or other social services, as appropriate to the needs of the juvenile and his or her family. Services shall include programs that require the participation of parents or guardians for the reasons set out in the legislative findings in §49-4-712a of this code.

(b) If the juvenile, or his or her parent, guardian or custodian, fails to comply with the services provided in subsection (a) of this section, the department may petition the circuit court:

(1) For a valid court order, as defined in §49-1-207 of this code, to enforce compliance with a service plan or to restrain actions that interfere with or defeat a service plan, including a mandate that parents or guardians participate in programs for juveniles in an out-of-home placement for the reasons set out in the legislative findings in §49-4-712a of this code; or

(2) For a valid court order to place a juvenile out of home in a nonsecure or staff-secure setting, and/or to place a juvenile in custody of the department: *Provided,* That a juvenile adjudicated as a status offender may not be placed in an out-of-home placement, excluding placements made for abuse and neglect, if that juvenile has had no prior adjudications for a status or delinquency offense, or no prior disposition to a pre-adjudicatory improvement period or probation for the current matter: *Provided, however,* That if the court findsby clear and convincing evidence the existence of a significant and likely risk of harm to the juvenile, a family member or the public and continued placement in the home is contrary to the best interests of the juvenile, such juvenile may be ordered to an out-of-home placement: *Provided further,* That the court finds the department has made all reasonable efforts to prevent removal of the juvenile from his or her home, or that such reasonable efforts are not required due to an emergent situation.

(c) In ordering any further disposition under this section, the court, is not limited to, the relief sought in the department’s petition and shall make reasonable efforts to prevent removal of the juvenile from his or her home or, as an alternative, to place the juvenile in a community-based facility which is the least restrictive alternative appropriate to the needs of the juvenile and the community. The disposition may include reasonable and relevant orders to the parents, guardians or custodians of the juvenile as is necessary and proper to effectuate the disposition.

(d) (1) If the court finds that placement in a residential facility is necessary to provide the services under subsection (a) of this section, except as prohibited by subdivision (2), subsection (b) of this section, the court shall make findings of fact as to the necessity of this placement, stated on the record or reduced to writing and filed with the record or incorporated into the order of the court.

(2) The findings of fact shall include the factors that indicate:

(A) The likely effectiveness of placement in a residential facility for the juvenile; and

(B) The community services which were previously attempted.

(e) The disposition of the juvenile may not be affected by the fact that the juvenile demanded a trial by jury or made a plea of not guilty. Any order providing disposition other than mandatory referral to the department for services is subject to appeal to the Supreme Court of Appeals.

(f) Following any further disposition by the court, the court shall inquire of the juvenile whether or not appeal is desired and the response shall be transcribed; a negative response may not be construed as a waiver. The evidence shall be transcribed as soon as practicable and made available to the juvenile or his or her counsel, if it is requested for purposes of further proceedings. A judge may grant a stay of execution pending further proceedings.

(g) A juvenile adjudicated solely as a status offender on or after January 1, 2016, may not be placed in a Division of Juvenile Services facility

§49-4-712a. Parents mandated to participate in outside the home treatment programs.

(a) *Legislative findings*. – The Legislature finds that according to the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources there are currently more than 7000 children in foster care in this state, and thousands more receiving services in long-term, out-of-home residential treatment centers for the treatment of substance abuse, disruptive behavior, and mental or emotional difficulties. Compelling parents to participate in treatment with children who have been placed outside of the home for the treatment of substance abuse, disruptive behavior, and mental or emotional difficulties will aid in improving the effectiveness of services, shortening the length of stay in out-of-home environments, and providing a more effective and less expensive approach to treatment of children in care.

The Legislature recognizes the problems of substance abuse, emotional disturbance, and discordant behavior in children and adolescents as the by-product of mental health disorder that has long been treated by focusing on the child alone. If these problems are defined and recognized as a conflict within a child’s environment considerably more options for interventions to help solve and resolve these issues present themselves. Environmental contributions to childhood difficulties are often overlooked, including the absence of effective parenting practices that are frequently directly related to the presence of those difficulties. However, current procedures are to treat the child who is expressing the problem without conducting any intervention with the other people involved in the child’s life.

The Legislature further finds that children who have been labeled as troubled in their home, community, and school system, frequently become less troubled once removed from the environment that directly contributes to their difficulties with success. When the child is returned to the home environment without any intervention occurring within that environment, the end result often remains the same; and there is a recreation of the behaviors that have previously been defined as troubled.

West Virginia is challenged by a lack of adequate foster placements for children, a lack of adequate in-home services, a lack of an adequate workforce to create improvements in either, in addition to a lack of parent involvement in treatment services for children. If family involvement in treatment can begin as soon as the child is placed in an out-of-home setting, the opportunity for success in treatment will increase dramatically.

The Legislature further finds that it is paramount to begin to include families in the treatment of children who suffer from substance addiction, emotional disturbance, and behavior difficulties. Given societal preference in defining these problems as the sole responsibility of the child, families are content to allow the child to undergo treatment independently and are opposed to participating in treatment concurrently with the child. When this occurs, the only improvement occurs solely with the child and parents remain ill prepared to manage the child or the troubling behaviors. Family involvement in the treatment process is a vital component for children receiving out-of-home care. Parental and family involvement leads to more positive outcomes, shorter lengths of stay, more rapid reunification, and less frequent needs for additional out-of-home placements. If behavioral change and reintegration into the family is the goal of treatment, family involvement and participation in treatment are necessary. Involvement by the family members can assist the child by reducing anxiety, aiding in the attachment and bonding of the child with family members, and validating and understanding the child’s trauma, stressors, or deficits which have resulted in involvement with system. Family involvement allows families to know and understand the treatment the child is receiving, which will increase their ability to aid in the decision-making process of their child’s treatment. Family involvement in treatment also enables service providers to educate parents about the importance of continuing treatment once reunification is achieved. As families gain knowledge about their child, they will be better prepared in managing typical patterns of behavior, providing a solid support system, establishing a healthier bond with the child, and understanding and addressing the causes of addiction, emotional disturbance and discordant behavior. Treatment interventions for children with these issues require the family to serve as critical agents of change for improvement. If families are not compelled to actively engage in treatment, they have historically demonstrated the stance of accepting the child’s journey through the treatment process independently.

(b) Subject to the provisions of §49-4-712a of this code, parents or guardians shall be required to participate in programs designed for out-of-home placement including family therapy sessions offered by the treatment provider.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to require parents or guardians to participate in programs for juveniles in an out-of-home placement.

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Strike-throughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.