

3-18-2019

From: Sadie Heindel <sadieheindel@u.boisestate.edu>
Sent: Friday, March 15, 2019 8:58 PM
To: Senator Todd Lakey; Senator Abby Lee; Sharon Pennington
Subject: HB 170 Testimony

Please consider this as written testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Dear Senate Judiciary Committee:

My name is Sadie Heindel. I am a resident of District 18. I am a Licensed Social Worker who has interacted with children and families in a child welfare setting for almost two years.

I am urging you to vote no on HB 170 – Child Protection Notification/Waiver. HB 170 has the potential to cause needless trauma to families and lead them to incorrectly believe they are the subject of a criminal matter. Additionally, HB 170 can lead to children being left in an unsafe home for a prolonged period of time. The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare (IDHW) is not a law enforcement agency. An investigation occurs prior to charges being filed; the goal of an investigation is to assess the safety of children. It is the responsibility of law enforcement to read rights and give due process once charges have been filed; this is not a responsibility of the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare. If IDHW workers are tasked with reading rights before entering a home and conducting a safety assessment, families will be hesitant to participate in an assessment out of confusion and fear. IDHW often opens assessments and learns that the family simply needs additional services, such as assistance paying an electric bill or a visit to a food bank. If families don't allow IDHW into their homes, they won't receive these services

Currently, licensed bachelor and master's level social workers in child welfare receive a significant amount of initial and ongoing training in assessment and family-centered practice. Child welfare social workers are experts in engaging families in a trauma-informed manner and linking them to resources to keep a child safe in their home whenever possible. HB 170 will hinder a social worker's effectiveness in the community.

Imagine you are a parent and your child broke his wrist while playing. You take your child to the doctor and ensure they receive proper medical treatment. The next day, a social worker contacts you stating that somebody called in a referral about the broken wrist. You are able to explain how the injury happened and express that a miscommunication in the emergency room must have led to the call. The social worker is able to quickly assess the situation and disposition the referral as being erroneous. HB 170 would insert a social worker at your door reciting Miranda Rights, causing additional stress on your family, and perhaps even making you more hesitant to seek medical help in the future out of fear of another call to child protection.

Conversely, imagine you are a young child that is being neglected by a caregiver. One day, a social worker comes to your home, builds rapport with your family, and learns about the stress your parents are facing. The social worker links them to community resources and engages your grandmother and a neighbor to come watch you after school and mentor your parents so they can take care of you. With HB 170, the social worker's ability to build a working relationship and impact change will be diminished and increases risk to a vulnerable child.

In cases of physical or sexual abuse, law enforcement will already be involved and is tasked with advising adults of their Miranda rights. HB 170 will result in a duplication of work among government agencies.

The fiscal impact of HB 170 is significantly understated, as it will increase the workload and cost of public defenders, judges, and law enforcement. It will also intensify the strain on a child welfare system that has been consistently impacted by staffing shortages and workload challenges.

I urge you to please let social workers do the jobs they are specifically trained for, and not force bureaucracy onto Idaho families. Vulnerable children in our community will be better served by a no vote on HB 170.

I also ask that the impact of this legislation be explored through the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare and stakeholders (i.e. law enforcement, judiciary) to more fully understand the consequences of HB 170.

Sincerely,
Sadie Heindel, LSW
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