



Human Services

During the 2020 session, the General Assembly considered bills related to early childhood education; child welfare investigations; appropriating federal CARES Act funding; and other human services programs.

Early Childhood

House Bill 20-1006 would have required the Department of Human Services (DHS) to develop and implement a statewide early childhood mental health consultation program by July 1, 2022. The bill was deemed lost by the House Appropriations Committee.

House Bill 20-1053 makes several changes to state laws related to the early childhood quality improvement programs, including:

- directing DHS to develop and implement a statewide voluntary program of early childhood mental health consultation;
- authorizing DHS to provide help to early childhood care providers to increase their Colorado Shines rating (a DHS rating system of all centers assigning a score of one to five); and
- requiring DHS to promulgate rules related to licensing standards for credentialing of early childhood educators.

Senate Bill 20-144 would have created a grant program in DHS to expand access to home visiting programs that improve children's school readiness. The bill was postponed indefinitely by

the Senate Health and Human Services Committee.

House Bill 20-1011 would have required DHS to run a public awareness campaign about expectations from early childcare providers, what children should know before they enter kindergarten, and early childhood resources. DHS would also have had to implement a series of workshops on effective childhood education and licensure requirements. The bill was deemed lost by the House Appropriations Committee.

Child Welfare

House Bill 20-1277 would have required DHS to create a document that contains a notice of the rights afforded to parents involved in an investigation of child abuse or neglect. The bill was postponed indefinitely by the House Public Health Care and Human Services Committee.

Currently, allegations of child abuse or neglect are entered into the state's child welfare data system, TRAILS. *House Bill 20-1105* would have prohibited DHS from entering the name of a person suspected of child abuse or neglect into TRAILS until after a hearing finds sufficient evidence to support the allegations. The bill was postponed indefinitely by the House Public Health Care and Human Services Committee.

Senate Bill 20-028 creates new standards for determining child abuse, neglect, or dependency when alcohol or substance exposure is involved

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by modifying the definition of “child abuse or neglect” in statute to include any newborn child who is affected by alcohol or drug exposure and has factors present that threaten the health or welfare of the newborn child. The bill excludes situations when substances are taken as prescribed by a health care provider. The bill also continues the opioid and substance use disorders committee for an additional four years; directs the committee to study the relationship between mental health conditions and substance use disorders, and the effect of COVID-19 on substance use disorders; and requires DHS to promulgate rules based on the new standards for determining child abuse, neglect, or dependency.

House Bill 20-1317 would have made changes to the Colorado Children’s Trust Fund (CCTF), including increasing the membership of the board from 9 to 17 members; renaming the fund to the “Colorado Child Abuse Prevention Trust Fund”; and expanding the power of the board to implement plans to reduce child maltreatment. The bill was deemed lost by the House.

Allocating CARES Act Funding

House Bill 20-1411 appropriates money Colorado received as part of the federal “Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act” to fund behavioral and mental health programs. The money was allocated to programs in the departments of Human Services, Public Health and Environment, Higher Education, and Law.

House Bill 20-1422 creates the Food Pantry Assistance Grant Program, which aims to aid food banks in the purchase of new food and create new market opportunities for Colorado’s agriculture producers. The bill allocates money from the federal CARES Act to the new grant program.

House Bill 20-1197 requires DHS to award grant funding from the CARES Act to Colorado 2-1-1,

the centralized number for callers to access services. This funding must be used for human services referrals through December 30, 2020, relating to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Other DHS Programs

House Bill 20-1220 would have required DHS to conduct an assessment of the services provided by the veterans’ community living centers including assessing the changing demographics of the veteran population; treatment needs for younger veterans; best practices for treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder; and the advantages and limitations of care provided in existing veterans centers. The bill was deemed lost by the House.

Criminal Penalty and Public Assistance Disqualification

Under current law, it is a class 1 misdemeanor for an individual to post the personal information of any law enforcement official, caseworker, or their immediate family members on the internet if that information would pose a serious or imminent threat. *House Bill 20-1052* replaces the definition of “caseworker” in statute with a new definition of “human services worker” to include state and county employees, including county attorneys and contractors involved in certain investigations.

Under current law, an individual who commits an intentional violation of a public assistance program is disqualified from participating in any public assistance program. *Senate Bill 20-206* clarifies that an individual who commits an intentional violation will only be disqualified from the public assistance program in which the intentional violation occurred.