

## **Child welfare early response: HB 2858.**

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This bill has three key objectives: to

- Reduce child abuse through *early intervention*
- Save state funds used to investigate multiple and recurring reports of abuse, and avoid foster care and other costs
- Provide information to and support families in need

The basic notion is this: Department of Human Services case workers who investigate child welfare reports are prevented from further involvement with the family if there is insufficient evidence of abuse or neglect. This may lead to elevated risk to the child if the family is still in need of services to address the issues challenging the family.

This bill develops a pilot program that applies to families with children up to five years of age where an investigation by DHS can not substantiate a report of alleged child abuse. The pilot program will require DHS to provide information to the child and the child's parent about the Relief Nursery, within 24 hours. Relief Nursery will contact the family by phone to ask whether they'd like to meet, at the home or at the Relief Nursery, or just talk on the phone about what services there may be to help them. We're talking about local community resources – not the Department of Human Services. Services such as, respite services, parental education and support, alcohol and drug support services, and mental health services.

We know about a number of similar family service programs around the state, so why is this a pilot program starting in Lane County? Frankly, it's because this idea has been kicking around between Relief Nursery and DHS in Lane County for more than a couple of years now, yet no one has gotten around to doing anything about it. I want to give it a prod: it's a good idea, it's based on sound practices – namely, early intervention, differential response, and community resources. It saves money, and it helps kids and families. So let's do it, see if it yields the success we think it will, and then it can be replicated more broadly.

I'm concerned that we're basically turning our backs on kids, and their parents, until things are so bad that someone's already been hurt. This bill says let's stop ignoring problems, and instead think about differential response – respond appropriately, as early as possible, and avoid harsher interventions later.