

An overview of *An Act to enhance child welfare protections*, the recent child welfare omnibus bill signed into law in August.

Bill Overview

- Child Requiring Assistance (CRA) Reforms
- Expansion of OCA Duties & Authorities
- New DCF Responsibilities
- Foster Child Bill of Rights

Effective Dates

CRA

- Parental/Guardian Petition 1 year from effective date (Nov 2027)
- School Petition 90 days from effective date (Nov 2026)

FRC 1 year from effective date (Nov 2027)

- Codifying Existing Practices
- Case Management
- Confidentiality & Data Reporting

CRA Reforms - Highlights

- Raises the minimum age for a CRA from 6 to 12
- Clarifies CRA's are for youth not already in DCF or DYS custody

Parental/Guardian Petition

Petition must include whether there were any FRC visits or services within 180 days

- If no services in last 180 days, the clerk must refer to FRC prior to scheduling a hearing
- If services were given in last 180 days (or if petitioner waives referral), clerk must schedule hearing within 15 days
- Petitioner can waive FRC referral but Court must not encourage a petitioner to waive referral

CRA Reforms - Highlights

School Petition

New information required in petition:

- Whether the child / caregiver was referred to an FRC in petition
- Specific steps taken by the school to support the child's attendance or conduct (as relevant)

Schools may not file a petition to address matters that fall within their legal obligations

Before scheduling a hearing, Probation must consult with FRC on whether child/caregiver made contact with the FRC and exhausted all relevant services

Changes to FRC Statute

Codifying Existing Practices

- Adds statutory focus on preventing entry or re-entry to the child protective service and child requiring assistance systems
- Adds requirement to assist families in connecting with local, state, and federal services to help meet basic needs
- Adds requirement to provide services for children at risk of chronic absenteeism and those referred by schools and juvenile courts.

Case Management

- Requires FRC to assign a case manager to high needs families (subject to appropriation)
- Authorizes FRC to convene a multidisciplinary review team (MRT) to help a family avoid involvement with the CRA system

Confidentiality & Data Reporting

Additional Updates

- **Codifying the Foster Child Bill of Rights**, mandating many critical rights for youth including identity-affirming placement and care, sibling connections, timely and thorough planning for youth exiting care without permanency, and more
- **Adding key data to the DCF Annual Report**, and consolidating language about reporting
- **Requiring the OCA to examine issues of disproportionality**
- **Facilitating smoother school transitions** for youth in foster care
- **Establishing a commission to study the feasibility of a digital education portfolio**
- Additional sections of the bill make changes to the OCA and its scope and authority, the work of the child fatality review team, some child welfare definitions and reporting, and more.

Learn more:
https://www.childrensleague.org/ma-legislature-passes-child-welfare-reform-bill/