

1 State of Arkansas
2 90th General Assembly
3 Regular Session, 2015
4

A Bill

HOUSE BILL 1624

5 By: Representative D. Meeks
6

For An Act To Be Entitled

8 AN ACT TO INCREASE PROTECTIONS FOR CHILDREN IN
9 DEPENDENCY-NEGLECT CASES; TO PROVIDE ATTORNEYS AD
10 LITEM WITH INCREASED ACCESS TO INFORMATION REGARDING
11 CHILD CLIENTS IN DEPENDENCY-NEGLECT CASES; TO IMPROVE
12 THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR KEEPING SIBLINGS IN FOSTER CARE
13 TOGETHER; TO PROVIDE AUTHORITIES WITH BETTER TOOLS
14 FOR ASSESSING POTENTIAL CUSTODIANS IN DEPENDENCY-
15 NEGLECT CASES; AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.
16
17

Subtitle

18 TO INCREASE PROTECTIONS FOR CHILDREN IN
19 DEPENDENCY-NEGLECT CASES; TO KEEP
20 SIBLINGS IN FOSTER CARE TOGETHER; AND TO
21 PROVIDE AUTHORITIES AND ATTORNEYS AD
22 LITEM WITH BETTER TOOLS FOR RESOLVING
23 DEPENDENCY-NEGLECT CASES.
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26

27 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ARKANSAS:
28

29 SECTION 1. Arkansas Code § 9-27-310(b)(2), concerning petitions to
30 commence dependency-neglect of proceedings, is amended to read as follows:

31 (2) Only a law enforcement officer, prosecuting attorney, ~~or~~ the
32 Department of Human Services or its designee, or a dependency-neglect
33 attorney ad litem employed by or contracting with the Administrative Office
34 of the Courts may file a dependency-neglect petition seeking ex parte
35 emergency relief.
36



1 SECTION 2. Arkansas Code § 9-27-310, concerning the commencement of
2 juvenile proceedings, is amended to add an additional subsection to read as
3 follows:

4 (g) An attorney ad litem appointed under § 12-18-1001(e) shall review
5 all relevant information from the juvenile proceeding regarding the child or
6 children for whom protective custody was taken and shall file any pleadings
7 that may be necessary to protect the health, safety or welfare of the child
8 or children.

9
10 SECTION 3. Arkansas Code § 9-27-311(a), concerning the required
11 contents of a dependency-neglect petition, is amended to read as follows:

12 (a) The petition shall set forth the following:

13 (1)(A) The name, address, gender, social security number, and
14 date of birth of each juvenile subject of the petition.

15 (B) A single petition for dependency-neglect or family in
16 need of services shall be filed that includes all siblings who are subjects
17 of the petition;

18 (2) The name and address of each of the parents or the surviving
19 parent of the juvenile or juveniles;

20 (3) The name and address of the person, agency, or institution
21 having custody of the juvenile or juveniles;

22 (4) The name and address of any other person, agency, or
23 institution having a claim to custody or guardianship of the juvenile or
24 juveniles;

25 (5) In a proceeding to establish paternity, the name and address
26 of both the putative father and the presumed legal father, if any; ~~and~~

27 (6) In a dependency-neglect proceeding, the name and address of
28 a putative parent, if any; and

29 (7) In a dependency-neglect proceeding:

30 (A) The name, address, gender, and date of birth of any
31 sibling of a juvenile named as respondent to the petition; and

32 (B) The name of each parent, guardian or custodian of a
33 sibling of a juvenile named as respondent to the petition.

34
35 SECTION 4. Arkansas Code § 9-27-311(c), concerning the required
36 contents of a dependency-neglect petition, is amended to read as follows:

1 (c)(1) All persons named in subdivisions (a)(1)-(3) of this section
 2 and subdivision (a)(6) of this section shall be made defendants and served as
 3 required by this subchapter.

4 (2) However:

5 (A) In all paternity actions, the petitioner shall be
 6 required to name as defendants only the mother, the putative father, and the
 7 presumed legal father, if any; and

8 (B) In dependency-neglect petitions the juvenile shall ~~not~~
 9 ~~be named as a defendant but shall~~ have party status and be named in the
 10 petition as a respondent and shall be served ~~as a party defendant~~ under § 9-
 11 27-312.

12
 13 SECTION 5. Arkansas Code § 9-27-311(d)(2), concerning the required
 14 contents of a dependency-neglect petition, is amended to add additional
 15 subdivisions to read as follows:

16 (C) The supporting affidavit of facts shall include known
 17 information regarding the fitness of the noncustodial parent to be considered
 18 for custody, placement, or visitation with the juvenile.

19 (D) If the petition for dependency-neglect is filed by the
 20 Department of Human Services, the supporting affidavit of facts shall include
 21 a list of all contact the department has had with the family before the
 22 filing of the petition, including without limitation hotline calls,
 23 investigations, and open cases.

24
 25 SECTION 6. Arkansas Code § 9-27-316(f)(4), concerning the right to
 26 counsel in delinquency and family in need of services cases, is amended to
 27 read as follows:

28 (4)(A) An attorney ad litem shall be provided access to all
 29 records relevant to the juvenile's case, including, but not limited to,
 30 school records, medical records, all court records relating to the juvenile
 31 and his or her family, and records, including those maintained electronically
 32 and in the Children's Reporting and Information System, of the Department of
 33 Human Services to the extent permitted by federal law.

34 (B) Within fourteen (14) calendar days after a written
 35 request from the attorney ad litem, the Department of Human Services shall
 36 provide physical or electronic copies of records, including those maintained

1 electronically and in the Children's Reporting and Information System, in the
2 department's possession that the attorney ad litem or his or her client is
3 legally entitled to have access.
4

5 SECTION 7. Arkansas Code § 9-27-316(g)(4), concerning the right to
6 counsel in delinquency and family in need of services cases, is amended to
7 read as follows:

8 (4)(A) Upon presentation of an order of appointment, a court-
9 appointed special advocate shall be provided access to all records relevant
10 to the juvenile's case, including, but not limited to, school records,
11 medical records, all court records, including those maintained electronically
12 and in the Children's Reporting and Information System, relating to the
13 juvenile and his or her family, and department records to the extent
14 permitted by federal law.

15 (B) Within fourteen (14) calendar days after a written
16 request from the court-appointed special advocate, the department shall
17 provide physical or electronic copies of any records, including those
18 maintained electronically and in the Children's Reporting and Information
19 System, in the department's possession that the court-appointed special
20 advocate is legally entitled to have access.
21

22 SECTION 8. Arkansas Code § 9-27-316(h)(1), concerning the right to
23 counsel in delinquency and family in need of services cases, is amended to
24 add an additional subdivision to read as follows:

25 (E) In a dependency-neglect proceeding naming a minor
26 parent as a defendant, the court shall appoint a qualified parent counsel for
27 the minor parent.
28

29 SECTION 9. Arkansas Code § 9-27-316(h)(7), concerning the right to
30 counsel in delinquency and family in need of services cases, is amended to
31 read as follows:

32 (7)(A) The attorney for the parent or custodian shall be
33 provided access to all records relevant to the juvenile's case, including
34 without limitation school records, medical records, all court records,
35 including those maintained electronically and in the Children's Reporting and
36 Information System, relating to the juvenile and his or her family, and

1 department records to which the parent or custodian is entitled under state
 2 and federal law.

3 (B) Within fourteen (14) calendar days after a written request
 4 from the attorney for the parent or custodian, the department shall provide
 5 physical or electronic copies of any records, including those maintained
 6 electronically and in the Children’s Reporting and Information System, in the
 7 department’s possession that the attorney for the parent or custodian or
 8 their client is legally entitled to have access.

9
 10 SECTION 10. Arkansas Code § 9-27-327(a), concerning dependency-neglect
 11 adjudication hearings, is amended to read as follows:

12 (a)(1) An adjudication hearing shall be held to determine whether the
 13 allegations in a petition are substantiated by the proof.

14 (2)(A) If the court finds that the juvenile is dependent-
 15 neglected by a custodial parent, the court shall address whether a
 16 noncustodial parent contributed to the dependency-neglect and whether the
 17 noncustodial parent is a fit parent for purposes of custody or visitation.

18 (B) If the court determines that the child cannot safely
 19 be placed in the custody of the noncustodial parent, the court shall make
 20 specific findings of fact regarding the safety factors that need to be
 21 corrected by the noncustodial parent before placement or visitation with the
 22 juvenile.

23 (3) Evidence shall be presented to the court regarding all prior
 24 contact between the agency and the juvenile or the family before a finding of
 25 reasonable efforts to prevent removal by the Department of Human Services.

26 (4) (4) A finding of reasonable efforts to prevent removal of
 27 the juvenile is void if the court determines that the department failed to
 28 disclose all prior contact between the agency and juvenile or the family
 29 before the finding.

30 ~~(2)(5)(A)~~ (5)(A) The dependency-neglect adjudication hearing shall be
 31 held within thirty (30) days after the probable cause hearing under § 9-27-
 32 315.

33 (B) On a motion of the court or any party, the court may
 34 continue the adjudication hearing up to+

35 ~~(A) Sixty~~ sixty (60) days after the probable cause hearing
 36 for good cause shown; ~~and~~

1 ~~(B) Ninety (90) days after the probable cause hearing if~~
 2 ~~finding that necessary and relevant evidence cannot be obtained in a timely~~
 3 ~~manner.~~

4 ~~(3)(6)~~ If the juvenile has previously been adjudicated a
 5 dependent-neglected juvenile in the same case in which a motion for a change
 6 of custody has been filed to remove the juvenile from the custody of a
 7 parent, a subsequent adjudication is required if the ground for the removal
 8 is not the same as the ground previously adjudicated.

9
 10 SECTION 11. Arkansas Code § 9-27-361(a)(1), concerning court reports
 11 for dependency-neglect review hearings, is amended to read as follows:

12 (a)(1) Seven (7) business days ~~prior to~~ before a scheduled dependency-
 13 neglect review hearing, including the fifteenth-month review hearing and any
 14 post-termination of parental rights hearing, the Department of Human Services
 15 and a court-appointed special advocate, if appointed, shall:

16 (A) file File with the juvenile division of circuit court
 17 a review report including a certificate of service that the report has been
 18 distributed to all the parties or their attorneys and the court-appointed
 19 special advocate, if appointed; or

20 (B) Upload into the court case management database an electronic
 21 copy of the court report.

22
 23 SECTION 12. Arkansas Code § 9-27-361(a)(2), concerning court reports
 24 for dependency-neglect review hearings, is amended to add an additional
 25 subdivision to read as follows:

26 (D)(i) The department shall provide to all parties copies of all
 27 Children’s Reporting and Information System contact screens, placement
 28 screens, investigations, home studies, and comprehensive health evaluations
 29 entered or received by the department since the last hearing, by:

30 (A) Providing physical copies as an attachment to the
 31 court report; or

32 (B)(i) Uploading electronic copies into the court case
 33 management database.

34 (ii) The department may redact specific addresses of
 35 foster parents if it is in the best interest of the juveniles to do so and
 36 information protected by state or federal law.

1 (iii) A party who inadvertently receives information
2 protected by state or federal law shall immediately notify the department and
3 shall not further disclose the information, including to a client.
4

5 SECTION 13. Arkansas Code § 9-28-1003(a), concerning safeguards for
6 children in foster care, is amended to read as follows:

7 (a) Special safeguards, resources, and care should be provided to
8 children involved in dependency-neglect cases who are in foster care or in an
9 out-of-home placement because of the temporary or permanent separation from
10 parents.
11

12 SECTION 14. Arkansas Code § 9-28-1003, concerning safeguards for
13 children in foster care, is amended to add additional subsections to read as
14 follows:

15 (c) Sibling relationships are recognized to be unique and separate
16 from the parent-child bond due to the similar history, heritage, culture and
17 biology of the siblings and sibling separation is a significant and distinct
18 loss that must be repaired by frequent and regular contact, continuity and
19 stability during a child's placement in foster care or an out-of-home
20 placement and each child has the right to know and be actively involved in
21 his or her sibling's lives absent extraordinary circumstances.

22 (d) In addition to the safeguards identified under subsection (b) of
23 this section, siblings in foster care or in an out-of-home placement in this
24 state are entitled to the following unless a court specifically finds that it
25 is not in the best interest of the child:

26 (1) To live together in the same placement;

27 (2) To be separated only after:

28 (A) An assessment by a mental health professional
29 determines that placement of the siblings together would be detrimental to
30 the health, safety or well-being of one (1) or more of the juveniles; or

31 (B) The department presents evidence to the court that
32 there are no available relevant placements near the county where the juvenile
33 resided before entering care;

34 (3) If separated, to be placed in close proximity to siblings in
35 order to facilitate frequent and meaningful contact;

36 (4) If separated, to have visitation with all siblings that

1 shall be:

2 (A) Regular and consistent;

3 (B) Include face-to-face meetings, as well as alternate
4 methods of communication, at least one (1) time per week when possible; and

5 (C) Outlined in the case plan and approved by the court;

6 (5) To be actively involved in each sibling's life and share
7 celebrations including birthdays, holidays, graduations, and meaningful
8 milestones;

9 (6) To attend extracurricular events of each sibling including
10 without limitation athletic events, musical performances, scouting
11 ceremonies, and church events;

12 (7) To be included in case plan staffing decisions and
13 permanency planning decisions regarding siblings;

14 (8) To be informed of the expectations for continued contact in
15 the event that a sibling is placed or adopted separate from the sibling;

16 (9) To be notified of a change of placement for a sibling;

17 (10) To be informed when a sibling is being discharged from
18 foster care;

19 (11) If a sibling leaves care, to be allowed to maintain contact
20 with a sibling who remains in an out-of-home placement;

21 (12) To be supported in efforts to maintain relationships with
22 siblings who are not in care or have been adopted or placed in permanent
23 custody or guardianship separate from the child;

24 (13) To not have visitation or contact with a sibling withheld
25 as a behavioral consequence unless there are documented safety concerns; and

26 (14) If separated, have the sibling's case reviewed by the court
27 at least one (1) time every ninety (90) days for an assessment of the
28 separation and to determine whether there has been a reasonable effort to
29 reunite the siblings and to allow contact between the siblings consistent
30 with this section.

31 (e) A minor who is the custodial parent of one (1) or more children
32 and who is placed in foster care shall be placed in the same placement as the
33 child unless the court has adjudicated the child or children of the minor
34 parent to be dependent-neglected and the court finds that it is not in the
35 best interest of the child or children to be placed in the same placement as
36 the minor parent.

1
 2 SECTION 15. Arkansas Code § 12-18-1001(b), concerning protective
 3 custody of children generally, is amended to read as follows:

4 (b) However, custody shall not exceed seventy-two (72) hours except in
 5 the event that the expiration of seventy-two (72) hours falls on a weekend or
 6 holiday, in which case custody may be extended ~~through~~ to the end of the next
 7 business day following the weekend or holiday.

8
 9 SECTION 16. Arkansas Code § 12-18-1001, concerning protective custody
 10 of children generally, is amended to add an additional subsections to read as
 11 follows:

12 (c) If the department assesses the health and safety of a child and
 13 determines that there is an immediate danger to the health or physical well-
 14 being of the child in the care custody or control of the legal parent,
 15 guardian, or custodian, the department shall place the child into protective
 16 custody and shall not direct or allow the legal parent, guardian, or
 17 custodian to place the child in the care, custody, or control of another
 18 person.

19 (d) If the department assesses the health and safety of a child and
 20 determines that the child cannot safely remain in the care, custody, or
 21 control of the legal parent, guardian, or custodian without the
 22 implementation of a protection plan, the department shall file a petition for
 23 dependency-neglect.

24 (e) If protective custody is taken by a juvenile division circuit
 25 court judge during juvenile proceedings concerning the child or a sibling of
 26 the child, the court shall:

27 (1) Appoint a dependency-neglect attorney ad litem for the child
 28 or children for whom protective custody was taken, and

29 (2) Designate a member of the court's staff, a party to the
 30 juvenile case, or a juvenile officer to immediately provide a copy of the
 31 order of appointment and all relevant information from the juvenile case to
 32 the attorney ad litem appointed by the court.