

1 SENATE BILL NO. 182
2 INTRODUCED BY D. LENZ

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4 A BILL FOR AN ACT ENTITLED: "AN ACT CREATING AN INTERIM TASK FORCE TO STUDY THE
5 DEPENDENCY AND NEGLECT COURT SYSTEM; SPECIFYING MEMBERS AND DUTIES; PROVIDING
6 FOR CONTINGENT VOIDNESS; ESTABLISHING REPORTING REQUIREMENTS; AND PROVIDING AN
7 IMMEDIATE EFFECTIVE DATE AND A TERMINATION DATE."

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9 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MONTANA:

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11 NEW SECTION. Section 1. Task force on dependency and neglect court system. (1) There is a
12 task force on dependency and neglect court systems.

13 (2) The task force consists of ~~11~~12 members appointed as follows:

14 (a) two members of the house of representatives, one of whom must be appointed by the speaker
15 of the house of representatives and one of whom must be appointed by the minority leader of the house of
16 representatives;

17 (b) two members of the senate, one of whom must be appointed by the president of the senate
18 and one of whom must be appointed by the minority leader of the senate;

19 (c) one district court judge appointed by the chief justice of the supreme court; and

20 (d) ~~six~~seven members appointed by the governor, none of whom may be a currently serving
21 legislator, including:

22 (i) a county attorney or their representative;

23 (ii) a law enforcement officer;

24 (iii) a representative from the governor's office;

25 (iv) a tribal member with experience relating to the Indian Child Welfare Act;

26 (v) a member of the public having experience with the dependency and neglect court system; ~~and~~

27 (vi) a representative of the office of state public defender; and

28 (vii) a representative of the department of public health and human services.

1 (3) (a) Legislative members of the task force are entitled to receive compensation and expenses
2 as provided in 5-2-302.

3 (b) A nonlegislative member of the task force who is not a full-time salaried officer or employee of
4 the state or a political subdivision of the state is entitled to salary and expenses to the same extent as a
5 legislative member.

6 (c) A member of the task force who is a full-time salaried officer or employee of the state or a
7 political subdivision of the state is entitled to reimbursement for travel expenses as provided in 2-18-501
8 through 2-18-503.

9 (5) The task force shall select a presiding officer and a vice presiding officer by majority vote. The
10 presiding officer and the vice presiding officer must be legislative members.

11 (6) The legislative services division shall provide staff assistance to the task force. The legislative
12 fiscal division and the judicial branch shall provide information on request.

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14 **NEW SECTION. Section 2. Task force duties.** (1) The task force shall study dependency and
15 neglect court proceedings to determine whether a separate dependency and neglect court system or the
16 existing court system, with enhancements, would best serve children, families, and other participants involved
17 in dependency and neglect court proceedings.

18 (2) The study must examine:

19 (a) a separate dependency and neglect court system, including but not limited to examining the
20 following:

21 (i) alternative court systems that specialize in dependency and neglect cases;

22 (ii) structural issues related to a court specializing in dependency and neglect cases;

23 (iii) the manner for electing or appointing judges;

24 (iv) whether the dependency and neglect court system should be operated on a statewide,
25 regional, or local basis;

26 (v) changes needed to the existing court system to facilitate a separate dependency and neglect
27 court system;

28 (vi) the interaction between district courts and a separate dependency and neglect court;

- 1 (vii) funding; and
- 2 (viii) implementation of a separate dependency and neglect court; and
- 3 (b) the existing dependency and neglect court system, including but not limited to examining:
- 4 (i) changes that could be made to the current court system in place of creating a separate
- 5 dependency and neglect court system;
- 6 (ii) the strengths and weaknesses of the district courts in handling dependency and neglect cases;
- 7 (iii) whether dependency and neglect specialty courts could exist on a local level;
- 8 (iv) the interaction between dependency and neglect cases and family law cases;
- 9 (v) whether there could be a more expanded role for family courts;
- 10 (vi) other local court issues that affect families or dependency and neglect cases; and
- 11 (vii) funding.
- 12 (3) The task force shall involve input from the various stakeholders involved in dependency and
- 13 neglect court proceedings and, to the extent possible, consult with outside experts about Montana's system and
- 14 systems in other states.
- 15 (4) The task force may hold no more than six meetings.
- 16 (5) All aspects of the task force, including reporting requirements, must be concluded prior to
- 17 September 15, 2024. The task force shall prepare a final report of its findings, conclusions, and
- 18 recommendations and prepare draft legislation whenever appropriate. The task force shall submit the final
- 19 report to the governor, the chief justice of the supreme court, and the 69th legislature.

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21 **NEW SECTION. Section 3. Contingent voidness.** (1) Pursuant to Joint Rule 40-65, if [this act] does

22 not include an appropriation prior to being transmitted to the governor, then [this act] is void.

23 (2) If the appropriation is vetoed, then [this act] is void.

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25 **NEW SECTION. Section 4. Effective date.** [This act] is effective on passage and approval.

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27 **NEW SECTION. Section 5. Termination.** [This act] terminates June 30, 2025.

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