

Bill One. C-FIRST and Quest Real-Time Data Sharing and Milestone Alerts.

An act to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 37, Chapter 1, relative to child welfare data systems.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Tennessee:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 37-1-187, is amended by adding the following as a new subsection:

(e) In addition to the monthly reporting required under subsection (d), the department of children's services shall ensure that its child welfare information system, including the system known as C-FIRST, shares real-time data with the statewide juvenile case management system prescribed by the administrative office of the courts (Quest) for each child in the department's custody or under its supervision in a dependency and neglect, delinquent, or unruly case.

(1) The data shared under this subsection (e) shall include, at minimum: (A) Whether a comprehensive medical examination has been completed for the child and the date of completion; (B) Whether a mental health or substance abuse assessment has been completed, the date of completion, and the level-of-care recommendation made by the assessor; (C) The child's current placement, including facility name, address, and placement type; (D) All service referrals made on behalf of the child and the status of each referral; (E) Whether any statutory or court-ordered deadline applicable to the child's case has been missed; and (F) Any placement that does not match the assessor's level-of-care recommendation, together with any written justification filed by the department for the override.

(2) The system shall automatically generate an alert to court staff and regional department leadership whenever a statutory or court-ordered deadline is missed.

(3) A judge may access the data described in subdivision (e)(1) for any child whose case is pending before that court, without waiting for a scheduled hearing.

(4) Any record subject to 42 C.F.R. Part 2 shall be shared under this subsection only with the written consent of the patient or under a court order issued in accordance with 42 C.F.R. § 2.64. The department shall obtain such consent or order before sharing the record.

SECTION 2. This act takes effect July 1, 2027, the public welfare requiring

Bill Two. Assessment Before Disposition Sequencing with Enforcement.

An act to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 37, Chapter 1, Part 1, relative to assessments of children in custody.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Tennessee:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 37, Chapter 1, Part 1, is amended by adding the following as a new section:

37-1-1 __. (a) Prior to entering a disposition under Section 37-1-130, Section 37-1-131, or Section 37-1-132, the court shall be provided with: (1) the results of the child's comprehensive medical examination; and (2) the results of any mental health or substance abuse assessment, including the assessor's level-of-care recommendation, subject to 42 C.F.R. Part 2.

(b) The department shall complete an assessment required under subsection (a) within twenty-one (21) days of the child's removal or before disposition, whichever is later. If the assessment is not complete when disposition would otherwise be entered, the court may continue disposition for good cause under Tennessee Rules of Juvenile Procedure Rule 308, or enter an interim disposition that does not foreclose later assessment-based orders.

(c) If the department has not completed an assessment required under subsection (a) by the deadline in subsection (b), the court may: (1) order the department to show cause why the assessment has not been completed; (2) appoint an independent evaluator at the department's expense; or (3) find the department in contempt for failure to comply with a court order.

(d) If a child is returned home at disposition without a completed assessment, the department shall file a supplemental report with the court within fourteen (14) days identifying any services the child requires based on information obtained after the disposition.

(e) Any substance abuse assessment record subject to 42 C.F.R. Part 2, shall be provided to the court only with the written consent of the patient or under a court order issued in accordance with 42 C.F.R. 2.64, and the department shall obtain such consent or order. An independent evaluator appointed under subsection (c)(2) may serve as the qualified individual for a child placed in a qualified residential treatment program only if the evaluator meets the definition in 42 U.S.C. 675a(c)(1)(D), and the assessment meets the requirements of subparagraphs (A) through (C) of that subdivision.

SECTION 2. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 37-1-130(b) is amended by deleting the subsection and substituting instead the following:

(b) A child shall not remain in shelter care beyond thirty (30) days following disposition unless services tied to a completed assessment have been initiated, or the court finds on the record that such services are unavailable and orders an alternative plan with specific timelines.

SECTION 3. This act takes effect July 1, 2027, the public welfare requiring it.

Bill Three. TCCY Ombudsman Expansion.

An act to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 37, Chapter 3, Part 1, relative to the ombudsman for children and families.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Tennessee:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 37, Chapter 3, Part 1, is amended by adding the following as Section 37-3-108:

37-3-108. Ombudsman for children and families. (a) There is created the ombudsman for children and families, which is administratively attached to the Tennessee commission on children and youth. As used in this section, “department” means the department of children’s services.

(b) The ombudsman for children and families shall have the authority to: (1) issue subpoenas for the production of records and the attendance of witnesses in connection with any investigation or review conducted by the ombudsman under this section. (2) conduct unannounced inspections of any facility, including privately operated residential treatment centers, group homes, detention facilities, and transitional housing, in which a child in the custody of the department is placed. (3) require the department to respond in writing to any finding or recommendation of the ombudsman within thirty (30) days. (4) publish a public report whenever the department fails to respond, or responds in a manner the ombudsman determines is inadequate, including the department’s response alongside the ombudsman’s finding.

(c) Any person who knowingly fails to comply with a subpoena issued under subsection (b) commits a Class A misdemeanor.

SECTION 2. This act takes effect July 1, 2027, the public welfare requiring it.

Bill Four. Case Aide Classification.

An act to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 37, Chapter 5, Part 1, relative to case aide positions within the department of children's services.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Tennessee:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 37, Chapter 5, Part 1, is amended by adding the following as a new section:

37-5-1___. (a) The department of human resources, in consultation with the department of children's services, shall establish a case aide job classification for use by the department of children's services.

(b) Consistent with Section 8-30-321, the case aide classification shall not require a bachelor's degree, and the exception in Section 8-30-321(b) shall not apply to the classification. Minimum qualifications shall include a high school diploma or equivalent, passage of a background check, and completion of department-approved training.

(c) Case aides may perform non-clinical support functions, including but not limited to: (1) transportation of children to medical appointments, court hearings, and visitations. (2) scheduling and supervising family visitation. (3) document collection and data entry. (4) court accompaniment. (5) other tasks assigned by a case manager that do not require professional social work judgment.

(d) The creation of case aide positions shall not reduce the number of case manager positions authorized for the department.

SECTION 2. This act takes effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.

Bill Five. Judge Placement Authority and Placement Review.

An act to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 37, Chapter 1, Part 1, including Section 37-1-129, relative to judicial authority over placements of children in state custody.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Tennessee:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 37, Chapter 1, Part 1, is amended by adding the following as a new section:

37-1-1 __. (a)(1) The department shall provide the court with written notice of any proposed placement of a child in its custody, including the placement type, location, and the basis for the selection, at least five (5) business days before the placement is made, except in an emergency.

(2) The court may object to the proposed placement in writing within three (3) business days. If the court objects, the department shall not make the placement without either: (A) withdrawing the proposal and submitting an alternative; or (B) requesting a hearing before the court, at which the department shall bear the burden of demonstrating that the proposed placement is in the child's best interest.

(3) In an emergency placement, the department shall provide notice to the court within twenty-four (24) hours, and the court may order the child moved upon a finding that the placement is not in the child's best interest.

(b) The court shall conduct a placement review hearing at least every ninety (90) days for any child placed in a residential facility, group home, or out-of-region placement, to determine whether a more appropriate, less restrictive placement is available.

(c)(1) Nothing in this section shall be construed to transfer placement and care responsibility for the child from the department within the meaning of 42 U.S.C. 672(a)(2)(B). Any order of the court under subsection (a) that disapproves a placement or orders a child moved shall be entered after considering the department's recommendation, which shall be made part of the record.

(2) The placement review hearing required by subsection (b) is in addition to, and does not replace, the court approval or disapproval of a placement in a qualified residential treatment program required within sixty (60) days by 42 U.S.C. 675a(c)(2).

(3) Any placement of a child outside this state under this section is subject to the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children, Tennessee Code Annotated, Sections 37-4-201 through 37-4-207.

(4) This section shall be applied consistent with the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978, 25 U.S.C. 1901 and following.

SECTION 2. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 37-1-129(c)(1) is amended by adding the following at the end of the subdivision: The department's selection of a placement under this subdivision is subject to the notice, objection, emergency notice, and placement review requirements of Section 37-1-1 __, as created by Section 1 of this act.

SECTION 3. This act takes effect July 1, 2027, the public welfare requiring it.

Bill Six. Caseload Phased Targets.

An act to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 37-5-132, relative to case manager caseload limits.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Tennessee:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 37-5-132(a) is amended by deleting the language “an average, to be calculated at least monthly, of:” and subdivisions (1) and (2), which set the twenty-case and twenty-child averages, and substituting instead the following phased schedule, which applies separately to caseloads of active cases relating to initial assessments, including investigations of an allegation of child abuse or neglect, and to caseloads of children monitored and supervised in active cases relating to ongoing services: (1) effective July 1, 2027, no case manager shall be assigned more than sixteen (16) active cases. (2) effective July 1, 2028, no case manager shall be assigned more than fourteen (14) active cases. (3) effective July 1, 2029, no case manager shall be assigned more than twelve (12) active cases.

SECTION 2. If the department determines that compliance with Section 1 is not feasible due to insufficient qualified applicants, the commissioner shall file a written report with the general assembly and the comptroller of the treasury within sixty (60) days explaining the shortfall and the department’s plan to achieve compliance.

SECTION 3. This act takes effect July 1, 2027, the public welfare requiring it.

Bill 7. Private Facility Accountability, Incident Reporting, and Video Surveillance.

An act to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 37, relative to private providers of residential care for children in the custody of the department of children's services.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Tennessee:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 37, Chapter 5, Part 1, is amended by adding the following as a new section:

37-5-1___. (a) As used in this section:

(1) "Private provider" means any person or entity that contracts with the department of children's services to provide residential care, treatment, or placement services for children in the department's custody, including but not limited to group homes, residential treatment centers, halfway houses, and similar facilities;

(2) "Serious incident" means any allegation or occurrence of physical or sexual abuse, neglect, serious injury, death, restraint, seclusion, or any other event that must be reported under department policy or federal law.

(b) Every private provider shall report any serious incident involving a child in its care to the department and to the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth Ombudsman within twenty-four (24) hours of discovery. The report shall include the nature of the incident, the identities of all involved persons, and any immediate actions taken.

(c) Upon receipt of a report under subsection (b), the department shall immediately suspend the private provider's contract pending investigation if the incident involves an allegation of abuse or neglect. A knowing failure to report a serious incident as required by this section is punishable by a civil penalty of ten thousand dollars (\$10,000) per incident and may be referred to the district attorney general for prosecution as a Class A misdemeanor.

(d) Every private provider shall install and maintain continuous audio and video recording in all common areas, hallways, recreation spaces, intake areas, and any room used for restraint or seclusion. Recordings shall be retained for a minimum of ninety (90) days, or longer if an incident is under review or investigation. Recordings shall be stored in a system that the facility cannot unilaterally delete or alter. Upon request by the department, the Ombudsman, or a court, the private provider shall preserve and produce relevant footage within twenty-four (24) hours.

(e) All contracts between the department and private providers for residential care shall be awarded through competitive bidding. Any sole-source award shall be accompanied by a written justification filed with the comptroller of the treasury.

(f) The Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth Ombudsman shall have authority to inspect any private provider facility, demand and review video footage on short notice, and enforce the preservation requirements of this section.

SECTION 2. This act takes effect July 1, 2027, the public welfare requiring it.

Bill 8. Provisional Kinship Placement and Expedited Approval.

An act to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 37, relative to kinship and fictive-kin placements.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Tennessee:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 37, Chapter 2, Part 4, is amended by adding the following as a new section:

37-2-4___. (a) As used in this section:

- (1) “Kin” means a relative by blood, marriage, or adoption, or a fictive kin with a significant prior relationship to the child;
- (2) “Provisional kinship placement” means a court-ordered placement of a child with kin under this section that is immediately eligible for the expedited board rate and subject to the approval process set forth herein.
- (b) When a juvenile court places a child with kin, whether the case originated as a removal by the department of children’s services or as a private petition, the caregiver may elect to enter the provisional kinship placement process. Participation is optional. If the caregiver elects to participate, provisional approval and payment of the expedited board rate shall commence immediately upon the court’s placement order and the caregiver’s election.
- (c) A caregiver who elects to participate shall apply for full kin-specific approval within one hundred twenty (120) days of the placement order. Within forty-eight (48) hours of the placement order, the department shall initiate fingerprint-based criminal background checks and checks of the child abuse registry and sex offender registry for all adults in the home. Full kin-specific approval, using standards appropriate to relative and fictive-kin caregivers rather than stranger foster-home standards, shall be completed within one hundred twenty (120) days of the placement order.
- (d) The court retains full discretion to modify, continue, or terminate the placement at any time based on new information concerning the child’s safety or welfare. Nothing in this section requires the court to remove a child from a provisional kinship placement solely because an approval process is incomplete, because a later finding is made, or because the caregiver declines to participate or fails to complete the process.
- (e) The department shall establish separate licensing and approval standards for kin that reflect the differences between relative caregivers and non-relative foster parents. These standards shall not impose requirements that are unnecessary for the protection of the child.

(f) The department shall prioritize the use of available recruitment and family-finding resources toward identification and support of kin, including implementation of the provisional kinship process established by this section, before expending funds on external stranger-recruitment contracts.

SECTION 2. This act takes effect July 1, 2027, the public welfare requiring it.