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**HOUSE BILL NO. 653**

Offered January 12, 2022

Prefiled January 11, 2022

*A BILL to amend and reenact § 63.2-900 of the Code of Virginia, relating to foster care; local boards of social services; collaborative placement program.*

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 Patron—Wampler
 

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Committee Referral Pending

**Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:****1. That § 63.2-900 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:****§ 63.2-900. Accepting children for placement in homes, facilities, etc., by local boards.**

A. Pursuant to § 63.2-319, a local board shall have the right to accept for placement in suitable family homes, children's residential facilities or independent living arrangements, subject to the supervision of the Commissioner and in accordance with regulations adopted by the Board, such persons under 18 years of age as may be entrusted to it by the parent, parents or guardian, committed by any court of competent jurisdiction, or placed through an agreement between it and the parent, parents or guardians where legal custody remains with the parent, parents, or guardians.

The Board shall adopt regulations for the provision of foster care services by local boards, which shall be directed toward the prevention of unnecessary foster care placements and towards the immediate care of and permanent planning for children in the custody of or placed by local boards and that shall achieve, as quickly as practicable, permanent placements for such children. The local board shall first seek out kinship care options to keep children out of foster care and as a placement option for those children in foster care, if it is in the child's best interests, pursuant to § 63.2-900.1. In cases in which a child cannot be returned to his prior family or placed for adoption and kinship care is not currently in the best interests of the child, the local board shall consider the placement and services that afford the best alternative for protecting the child's welfare. Placements may include but are not limited to family foster care, treatment foster care, and residential care; *however, the local board shall seek to place the child with a foster family within the locality of the local board or a nearby locality through the collaborative local board placement program set forth in subsection F, provided that such placement is in the best interests of the child.* Services may include but are not limited to assessment and stabilization, diligent family search, intensive in-home, intensive wraparound, respite, mentoring, family mentoring, adoption support, supported adoption, crisis stabilization or other community-based services. The Board shall also approve in foster care policy the language of the agreement required in § 63.2-902. The agreement shall include at a minimum a Code of Ethics and mutual responsibilities for all parties to the agreement.

Within 30 days of accepting for foster care placement a person under 18 years of age whose father is unknown, the local board shall request a search of the Virginia Birth Father Registry established pursuant to Article 7 (§ 63.2-1249 et seq.) of Chapter 12 to determine whether any man has registered as the putative father of the child. If the search results indicate that a man has registered as the putative father of the child, the local board shall contact the man to begin the process to determine paternity.

The local board shall, in accordance with the regulations adopted by the Board and in accordance with the entrustment agreement or other order by which such person is entrusted or committed to its care, have custody and control of the person so entrusted or committed to it until he is lawfully discharged, has been adopted or has attained his majority.

Whenever a local board places a child where legal custody remains with the parent, parents or guardians, the board shall enter into an agreement with the parent, parents or guardians. The agreement shall specify the responsibilities of each for the care and control of the child.

The local board shall have authority to place for adoption, and to consent to the adoption of, any child properly committed or entrusted to its care when the order of commitment or entrustment agreement between the parent or parents and the agency provides for the termination of all parental rights and responsibilities with respect to the child for the purpose of placing and consenting to the adoption of the child.

The local board shall also have the right to accept temporary custody of any person under 18 years of age taken into custody pursuant to subdivision B of § 16.1-246 or § 63.2-1517. The placement of a child in a foster home, whether within or without the Commonwealth, shall not be for the purpose of adoption unless the placement agreement between the foster parents and the local board specifically so stipulates.

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59 B. Prior to the approval of any family for placement of a child, a home study shall be completed and  
60 the prospective foster or adoptive parents shall be informed that information about shaken baby  
61 syndrome, its effects, and resources for help and support for caretakers is available on a website  
62 maintained by the Department as prescribed in regulations adopted by the Board. Home studies by local  
63 boards shall be conducted in accordance with the Mutual Family Assessment home study template and  
64 any addenda thereto developed by the Department.

65 C. Prior to placing any such child in any foster home or children's residential facility, the local board  
66 shall enter into a written agreement with the foster parents, pursuant to § 63.2-902, or other appropriate  
67 custodian setting forth therein the conditions under which the child is so placed pursuant to § 63.2-902.  
68 However, if a child is placed in a children's residential facility licensed as a temporary emergency  
69 shelter, and a verbal agreement for placement is secured within eight hours of the child's arrival at the  
70 facility, the written agreement does not need to be entered into prior to placement, but shall be  
71 completed and signed by the local board and the facility representative within 24 hours of the child's  
72 arrival or by the end of the next business day after the child's arrival.

73 Agreements entered into pursuant to this subsection shall include a statement by the local board that  
74 all reasonably ascertainable background, medical, and psychological records of the child, including  
75 whether the child has been the subject of an investigation as the perpetrator of sexual abuse, have been  
76 provided to the foster home or children's residential facility.

77 D. Within 72 hours of placing a child of school age in a foster care placement, as defined in  
78 § 63.2-100, the local social services agency making such placement shall, in writing, (i) notify the  
79 principal of the school in which the student is to be enrolled and the superintendent of the relevant  
80 school division or his designee of such placement, and (ii) inform the principal of the status of the  
81 parental rights.

82 If the documents required for enrollment of the foster child pursuant to § 22.1-3.1, 22.1-270 or  
83 22.1-271.2, are not immediately available upon taking the child into custody, the placing social services  
84 agency shall obtain and produce or otherwise ensure compliance with such requirements for the foster  
85 child within 30 days after the child's enrollment.

86 E. Every local board shall submit to the Department through its statewide automated system the  
87 names of all foster parents licensed to provide foster care services in the locality served by the local  
88 board and update such list quarterly.

89 *F. The Department shall establish and implement a collaborative local board placement program to*  
90 *increase kinship placements and the number of locally approved foster homes. Such program shall*  
91 *require local boards to enter into partnership agreements with other local boards to work*  
92 *collaboratively to (i) facilitate approval of kinship foster parents through engagement, assessment, and*  
93 *training; (ii) increase the capacity of local boards to recruit, train, and develop foster parents; and (iii)*  
94 *expand the pool of available foster homes within and across the localities of such local boards.*