



Legislation Text

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Clerk 03/27/2014

A MOTION to create a safety of newborn children task force for King County.

WHEREAS, all newborn children deserve the opportunity to live and thrive as human beings, and

WHEREAS, a newborn child is most vulnerable within the first few hours of its life, and

WHEREAS, RCW 13.34.360 allows a parent within seventy-two hours of a child's birth to transfer his or her newborn to a qualified person at a hospital, fire station or federally designated rural health clinic and do so anonymously without fear of criminal prosecution for abandoning, or failing to support, the newborn, and

WHEREAS, the safety of newborn children law has been in effect in Washington state since 2002, and

WHEREAS, it is clear that the need exists to educate the public, including parents and would-be parents, on the existence of this law and identify locations where infants may be safely surrendered, and

WHEREAS, on February 12, 2014, the body of an infant was found near the side of a road in North Bend wrapped in a blanket with its umbilical cord attached, and

WHEREAS, a hospital where newborns can be safely surrendered was less than half a mile from where the baby was found, and

WHEREAS, the Washington state Department of Social and Health Services collects information concerning newborns transferred under the safety of newborn children law; however, data on newborns transferred in King County is not routinely provided to the county, and

WHEREAS, King County, as a deliverer of public services to pregnant mothers and parents of newborn children, has the ability to be a leader in effectuating better awareness and utilization of the safety of newborn children law, and

WHEREAS, Los Angeles county convened a safe haven task force that developed recommendations including suggestions for legislation improvements, potential safe haven site expansions, a public information campaign, standardized training modules and materials for providers to improve awareness and usage of California's safely surrendered baby law, serving as a model for other jurisdictions;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT MOVED by the Council of King County:

A. The executive is requested to convene a safety of newborn children task force for King County by April 30, 2014.

B. The purpose of the task force is to provide a report with recommendations to the King County council and executive on at least the following:

1. How King County can engage in an ongoing, regionally consistent public information campaign, utilizing county service intersection points such as public health, school clinics and the criminal justice system to educate service providers and the public about safe surrender of newborns. The report should include recommendations on messaging strategies, web-based information, brochures, or educational materials designed for general use as well as for responding in the event of a newborn abandonment incident;

2. How King County can work collaboratively with the state to obtain useful, timely data on instances of safe surrender and newborn abandonment; and

3. Whether the safe surrender locations for accepting newborns should be expanded through state legislation to include public health or community clinics or other entities.

C. The report and a motion acknowledging receipt of the report shall be filed with the clerk of the council by October 30, 2014, who shall forward an electronic copy to all councilmembers, the executive and the lead staff of the law justice health and human services committee.

D. The task force that the executive is requested to convene should include representatives from the following:

1. The executive;

2. The council;
3. Public health - Seattle & King County emergency medical services division;
4. Public health - Seattle & King County community health services division;
5. The department of community and human services;
6. The department of adult and juvenile detention;
7. The department of public defense;
8. The prosecuting attorney's office;
9. District court;
10. Superior court; and
11. The sheriff's office.

E. The executive should also invite representatives from the following entities to participate in the task force:

1. The board of health;
2. The Sound Cities Association;
3. The city of Seattle;
4. The King County Fire Chiefs Association;
5. The King County Women's Advisory Board;
6. A nongovernmental entity with expertise related to safe surrender, such as the nonprofit Safe Place for Newborns of Washington;
7. The Community Health Council;
8. UW Medicine;
9. Harborview Medical Center;
10. The Washington State Hospital Association; and
11. The state of Washington Department of Social and Health Services.

F. The executive, in consultation with the council, may add additional members to the task force as appropriate.

G. The task force is an advisory body and has no policy or rulemaking authority.

Any hearings held or public comment taken will be at the option of the task force but in no event be viewed to be on behalf of the council.