

LEGISLATIVE BILL 217

Approved by the Governor June 4, 2025

Introduced by Fredrickson, 20.

A BILL FOR AN ACT relating to child welfare; to amend section 71-1904, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, and section 71-1924, Revised Statutes Cumulative Supplement, 2024; to provide duties for the Department of Health and Human Services relating to certain curriculum and training materials; to require suicide awareness and prevention training for child welfare workers, for certain licensure, and for employees of child-placing agencies as prescribed; to harmonize provisions; to provide an operative date; and to repeal the original sections.

Be it enacted by the people of the State of Nebraska,

Section 1. For purposes of providing training for individuals involved in the child welfare system, the Department of Health and Human Services shall develop a baseline of curriculum and training materials related to suicide awareness and prevention in consultation with statewide and national organizations and professionals with expertise in behavioral and mental health and suicide prevention, including, but not limited to, the Nebraska State Suicide Prevention Coalition and the Behavioral Health Education Center of Nebraska. All such suicide awareness and prevention training shall incorporate evidence-based practices and may include, but not be limited to, (1) identification of early warning signs and symptoms of behavioral and mental health issues for youth in the child welfare system and (2) appropriate and effective responses for behavioral and mental health issues and trauma-informed care.

Sec. 2. All staff involved in the child welfare system of the Department of Health and Human Services that provide direct services to children or families or interact directly with children or families, and any other appropriate personnel as determined by the Division of Children and Family Services of the Department of Health and Human Services, shall have annual training in suicide awareness and prevention. Such training shall include current best practices of behavioral and mental health training with a focus on suicide awareness and prevention prior to any independent contact with youth and families. Such training shall be provided within the framework of existing training programs offered by the department.

Sec. 3. Section 71-1904, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, is amended to read:

71-1904 (1) The department shall adopt and promulgate rules and regulations pursuant to sections 71-1901 to 71-1906.01 for (a) the proper care and protection of children by licensees under such sections, (b) the issuance, suspension, and revocation of licenses to provide foster care, (c) the issuance, suspension, and revocation of probationary licenses to provide foster care, (d) the issuance, suspension, and revocation of provisional licenses to provide foster care, (e) the provision of training in foster care, which training shall be directly related to the skills necessary to care for children in need of out-of-home care, including, but not limited to, abused, neglected, dependent, and delinquent children, and (f) the proper administration of sections 71-1901 to 71-1906.01.

(2) The department may issue a waiver for any licensing standard not related to children's safety for a relative home that is pursuing licensure. Such waivers shall be granted on a case-by-case basis upon assessment by the department based upon the best interests of the child. A relative home that receives a waiver pursuant to this subsection shall be considered fully licensed for purposes of federal reimbursement under the federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, Public Law 110-351.

(3) The department shall adopt and promulgate rules and regulations establishing new foster home licensing requirements that ensure children's safety, health, and well-being but minimize the use of licensing mandates for nonsafety issues. Such rules and regulations shall provide alternatives to address nonsafety issues regarding housing and provide assistance to families in overcoming licensing barriers, especially in child-specific relative and kinship placements, to maximize appropriate reimbursement under Title IV-E of the federal Social Security Act, as amended, including expanding the use of kinship guardianship assistance payments under 42 U.S.C. 673(d), as such act and section existed on January 1, 2013.

(4) The department shall include suicide awareness and prevention training meeting the requirements of section 1 of this act for initial licensure and renewal of licensure pursuant to sections 71-1901 to 71-1906.01.

Sec. 4. Section 71-1924, Revised Statutes Cumulative Supplement, 2024, is amended to read:

71-1924 Sections 71-1924 to 71-1951 and section 5 of this act shall be known and may be cited as the Children's Residential Facilities and Placing Licensure Act.

Sec. 5. The department shall establish standardized suicide awareness and

prevention training requirements for all employees of a child-placing agency prior to any independent contact with youth and families. Such training shall incorporate a baseline of curriculum materials described in section 1 of this act while also allowing a child-placing agency to incorporate training elements that meet the specific needs of the individual agency. The department may approve the existing curriculum of a child-placing agency if such curriculum meets the baseline of curriculum pursuant to section 1 of this act.

Sec. 6. This act becomes operative on October 1, 2025.

Sec. 7. Original section 71-1904, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, and section 71-1924, Revised Statutes Cumulative Supplement, 2024, are repealed.