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S.F. No. 941 – Court-Appointed Counsel for Parents in Child Protection Proceedings (1st Engrossment)

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Overview

S.F. 941 requires courts to appoint counsel for eligible parents, guardians, and custodians before their first hearing in child protection proceedings. This bill also appropriates money to the commissioner of human services for costs related to appointment of counsel, to assist counties with implementation of the new law, and to collect data.

Summary

Section 1. Appointment of counsel. Requires the court to appoint counsel to represent each parent, guardian, or custodian before their first hearing and during the proceedings in all child protection proceedings where: (1) a child risks removal from the care of the parent, guardian, or custodian; and (2) the parent, guardian, or custodian desires counsel and is financially eligible. Removes specific statutory qualifications for attorneys retained by the county to represent parents, guardians, or custodians. This section is effective July 1, 2022.

Sec. 2. Appropriations. Appropriates \$520,000 in fiscal year 2022 and \$520,000 in fiscal year 2023 to the commissioner of human services for distribution to counties that do not currently provide court-appointed counsel to parents, guardians, or custodians who qualify. Appropriates money in fiscal year 2022 to the commissioner of human services to assist counties with implementation of the changes in **section 1** and title IV-E reimbursement, including statewide data collection. Specifies data to be collected. Requires the commissioner to submit a report on the data and efforts to assist counties to the legislature by July 1, 2022.