

[News from The Arizona Republic](#)

CPS bills will get Capitol hearings

by [Mary K. Reinhart](#) on Jan. 24, 2012, under [Arizona Republic News](#)

Lawmakers on Wednesday will get their first look at a raft of bills aimed at improving the state's Child Protective Services after a gubernatorial task force was formed in the wake of several high-profile child deaths last summer.

Two committees will hear the bills, which include proposals to develop a special committee to oversee CPS reforms and look into privatizing the agency, provide grandparents a stipend for raising their grandchildren, and require group homes to provide teens with life-skills training.

The bills are among dozens of reforms to Arizona's child-welfare system planned in the coming months. But it remains to be seen whether the efforts — which focus on what happens after CPS receives a report — will reduce CPS caseloads, slow the steady rise in the number of foster children or improve the safety of children.

Rep. Terri Proud, R-Tucson, said the Department of Economic Security, which oversees CPS, is the only state agency without an oversight committee. Under House Bill 2249, a 13-member committee would look for ways to improve CPS and investigate privatization efforts in other states.

Proud said the goal is to prevent CPS reforms from falling by the wayside.

"I would like to see the problems fixed instead of every three years us going through the same problem, the same legislation, over and over," she said. "We need to start having a more intimate relationship between the Legislature and this department."

Proud also wants to require foster-care group homes to provide social, emotional and life-skills support programs to children 12 years and older. HB 2250 requires DES to approve the programs and each group home to undergo an annual state audit.

Among children who turn 18 in foster care, half will be unemployed by their mid-20s and three out of four women will receive some kind of public assistance, most with children of their own, according to a 2010 study.

Proud's bills are on today's House Health and Human Services Committee agenda.

In the Senate, the Public Safety and Human Services Committee will hear several CPS-related bills.

Sen. Leah Landrum Taylor, D-Phoenix, hopes to revive a \$75 monthly stipend for grandparents raising their grandkids. The state cut the funding during budget cuts in 2010, and Landrum-Taylor said it would cost about \$1 million to help 1,100 grandparents.

"To them, it means everything," she said. "Because they don't have to feel guilty about 'Should I get my prescription or should I get my grandchildren some shoes?'" "

Under Senate Bill 1098, only grandparents who don't receive other public assistance and whose income falls below 200 percent of the federal poverty level would qualify for the per child stipend.

Other bills on the agenda would allow adoptive parents to refuse visitation from birth parents during the period from when the parents' rights are terminated to when the adoption is finalized. Another bill would speed the adoption process for relatives of a child in foster care.

In her budget proposal, Gov. Jan Brewer outlined new funding to add a unit of specially trained investigators, promote the most experienced field workers and add additional management staff in hopes of catching the most serious child-abuse cases.

The department has launched its own reforms, attempting to clear a backlog of more than 900 cases, review 360 cases that had multiple abuse or neglect reports, and streamline the investigations process to close certain low-level cases more quickly.

This entry was posted on Tuesday, January 24th, 2012 at 9:16 pm and is filed under [Arizona Republic News](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. You can skip to the end and leave a response. Pinging is currently not allowed.

[RSS feed for this post \(comments\)](#)

«