H.B. No. 474

AN ACT

relating to certain requirements regarding court-appointed volunteer advocate programs.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1.  Section 264.601, Family Code, is amended by adding Subdivisions (1-a) and (1-b) to read as follows:

(1-a)  "Active volunteer advocate" means an individual who:

(A)  has been trained by a volunteer advocate program in accordance with recognized standards for volunteer advocate programs; and

(B)  is currently serving as a volunteer advocate on at least one child's case.

(1-b)  "Inactive volunteer advocate" means an individual who:

(A)  has been trained by a volunteer advocate program in accordance with recognized standards for volunteer advocate programs; and

(B)  is not currently serving as a volunteer advocate.

SECTION 2.  Section 264.603(a), Family Code, is amended to read as follows:

(a)  The commission shall contract with one statewide organization that is exempt from federal income taxation under Section 501(a), Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as an organization described by Section 501(c)(3) of that code and that is composed of individuals or groups of individuals who have expertise in the dynamics of child abuse and neglect and experience in operating volunteer advocate programs to provide training, technical assistance, and evaluation services for the benefit of local volunteer advocate programs. The contract shall:

(1)  include measurable goals and objectives relating to the number of:

(A)  active volunteer advocates in the program; [~~and~~]

(B)  inactive volunteer advocates in the program; and

(C)  children receiving services from the program; and

(2)  follow practices designed to ensure compliance with standards referenced in the contract.

SECTION 3.  Section 264.604(a), Family Code, is amended to read as follows:

(a)  A person is eligible for a contract under Section 264.602 only if the person is a public or private nonprofit entity that operates a volunteer advocate program that:

(1)  uses individuals appointed as volunteer advocates or guardians ad litem by the court to provide for the needs of abused or neglected children;

(2)  has provided court-appointed advocacy services for at least six months;

(3)  provides court-appointed advocacy services for at least 10 children each month; [~~and~~]

(4)  has demonstrated that the program has local judicial support;

(5)  has adopted a grievance procedure to address complaints regarding negligence or misconduct related to a volunteer advocate's duties under Section 107.002; and

(6)  maintains accurate records regarding active volunteer advocates and inactive volunteer advocates under the program.

SECTION 4.  This Act takes effect September 1, 2023.

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    President of the Senate Speaker of the House

I certify that H.B. No. 474 was passed by the House on April 20, 2023, by the following vote:  Yeas 142, Nays 4, 2 present, not voting.

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Chief Clerk of the House

I certify that H.B. No. 474 was passed by the Senate on May 10, 2023, by the following vote:  Yeas 30, Nays 0.

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Secretary of the Senate

APPROVED:  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

                    Date

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                  Governor