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Washington State Child Abuse Reporting Laws: Summary of Legislative Changes, 1965 - 1996

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Social and Health Services administers Washington's Child Protective Services (CPS). CPS provides services which include 24-hour intake, assessment, emergency intervention, and emergency medical services for accepted referrals. If children are found to be at risk of abuse, services could include direct treatment, coordination, and development of community services, legal intervention, and case monitoring.¹

The Institute previously published an issue brief describing the rates of child abuse and neglect in Washington. That report assessed Washington's historical and current rates, also comparing the state to national trends.²

Reporting Laws

This paper describes how Washington State laws regarding child abuse have been amended since 1965. Each legislative change is summarized, allowing the reader to grasp the changes in state policy regarding abuse definitions and protected classes of individuals, as well as the amended categories of mandatory reporters.

Mandatory reporting was first enacted in 1971 and directed toward medical professionals, teachers, social workers, clergy, pharmacists, and DSHS employees. Since then, the group of mandatory reporters has been expanded several times.

When people consider the reported rates of child abuse and neglect, and their changes over time, it is helpful to pay some attention also to the expanded pool of mandatory reporters. We have estimated the proportion of the state's adults who had jobs subject to the mandatory reporting law for three time periods.

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¹ See, for example, Department of Social and Health Services Internet Page: <http://www.wa.gov/dshs/>.

² Washington State Institute for Public Policy, *Child Abuse or Neglect Trends in Washington State*, Olympia, WA, July 1996.