



Kenneth I. Gordon  
Massachusetts State Representative  
21<sup>st</sup> Middlesex District

July 13, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Cody Case, 617-722-2575

**Gordon Supports Bill to Bolster Commitment to Vulnerable Children and Families During COVID-19 State of Emergency**

*Legislation targets accountability and analysis amidst COVID-19 and racial equity crises*

(7/9/2020) – Representative Ken Gordon (D-Bedford) joined his House colleagues to pass a bill that strengthens the laws that ensure the safety and well-being of the Commonwealth’s youngest and most at-risk residents. The legislation strengthens the Department of Children and Families (DCF) policies and operations, develops a tool to retain and recruit foster families, holds DCF accountable for timely, accurate and relevant reports, and clarifies communication by the Child Advocate to the Legislature and state officeholders. I was crafted to address the needs of vulnerable children and families that have been amplified by the COVID-19 public health crisis and further illuminated through the lens of racial equity.

“We must protect the children under the care of DCF and support the wonderful foster parents who care for them, especially during the COVID-19 state of emergency” said Representative Gordon. “It is incumbent upon us to do everything we can to prevent abuse and support these families. This bill reaffirms our commitment to these children and families.”

In order to best understand the effects of the state of emergency related to COVID-19, this legislation requires DCF to report on various aspects of the child welfare and education system during the state of emergency. The bill requires:

- DCF to report monthly to the Legislature on changes in child abuse and neglect cases;
- DCF to implement a public information campaign to improve awareness of child abuse and neglect during the public health crisis;
- DCF to report on efforts to support the foster care system;
- DCF to analyze the effect on virtual and video services during COVID-19;
- Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to work with DCF to provide an analysis of active remote learning participation rates during the COVID-19 crisis, including participation rates of children with open DCF cases; and
- DESE to coordinate with DCF to develop a statewide plan to ensure effective and ongoing engagement relative to remote learning.

The bill also installs certain safeguards, including requirements for DCF to review the case transfer policy to improve protocols for complex cases, and create a managerial review in reunification decisions. It also requires social services programs to communicate more promptly with social workers conducting client and collateral checks.

The bill requires DCF to create a “Foster Parents’ Bill of Rights” outlining the relationship between the department and foster parents. The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified concerns regarding the rights of foster parents and this provision seeks to ensure that foster parents have the resources and information they need to provide care.

The bill requires that when there is reasonable belief that a child’s death is due to a state agency’s failure to protect them, the Child Advocate reports these findings to the governor, attorney general, and the legislature before the results of the report are released to the agency under investigation.

The bill now moves to the Senate.

###