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LB 886

LR 232

in our system with overwork for our individuals examining child abuse complaints in foster care situations and trying to make sure that our children are safe and sound in our state, and we are trying to do something about that problem. Now that issue is going to be looked at but it, again, fundamentally points to a problem overall, not just with Franklin, but the Franklin case highlights it. In addition, another bill, LB 886 is a follow-up to a bill introduced last year by myself. This year LB 886 is introduced by myself and Senator Schmit and it changes the way we prosecute child abuse and other family domestic violence issues so that the Attorney General would take over that responsibility away from the county attorneys. Again, this problem was brought to light prior to the Franklin case just as the caseload was but the Franklin case highlighted it for us, made it apparent what the problem is and allowed us the chance to move forward with some reform in this area. Now I truly believe that further research in this area, the Franklin study, will help us better know what broke down, what the problem was and will help us find other problems and, hopefully, solutions to those problems to make the system we have in place work better. I think anytime we can try to find more information, have more knowledge to base policy on, we will make better policy. And at this point we have got some information, but more I think can be found and more value will be, I think, gained from having that than not having it. And the cost involved, I know a number of people have gotten up to talk about \$200,000, well that scares me as well. \$200,000 is a lot of money, but let me cite for you the cost of some of these other measures to reform the system. LB 720 dealing with the caseworkers would cost over \$2 million more a year to bring us up to standards and we already increased the caseworkers over a million dollars a year last year. The child protection division in the Attorney General's Office would cost over a million dollars a year and in addition, this is just additional expenditures we need to make to reform the system, there is already in place a multimillion dollar system trying to take care of our children and protect our young people in this state. But despite the expenditure, despite the need for additional expenditure, we still have serious problems. The system is still not working the way it should. We have about 8,000 reported cases of child abuse a year in this state. That is 8,000 too many cases of child abuse and we need to stop that. In addition, about 60 percent, over 4,000, maybe 5,000 cases are confirmed. We have four or 5,000 children abused a year in this state. Now that system in place is doing some good in