

SPEAKER BAACK: Senator Wesely's amendment is adopted. Senator Wesely, on the bill.

SENATOR WESELY: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, members, I passed out for your review a memorandum that describes a bit about LB 410A. The bill itself came up on a consent calendar day when I wasn't able to be here. And I would just like to take briefly a minute to discuss this issue with you. This legislation comes from a frustration that I had with trying to deal with the many child welfare cases that are referred to my office. I think many of us have from time to time had constituents come to you discussing problems with the State Department of Social Services and other state departments, dealing with children, problems with foster care placements, problems with child abuse, problems with any number of other programs that are in place to care for children. And the difficulty we have seen is that the cases have mounted, the number of problems have increased. We all know of the many concerns we've had with child programs in the state. And the thinking was that we needed to have a resource for the members of the Legislature to reference various complaints received from our constituents so that we could, together, have an individual with an expertise and background to intervene and resolve disputes in this area. We have an Ombudsman's Office that is established to perform that function, under the Legislature. The Ombudsman has a number of staff, and they're employees of the Legislature, and their job is to help us deal with these issues. The difficulty is that in this particular area I think we've seen a heightened interest in children's issues, in children's problems and concerns that are affecting them, and having them lost in the system, in a system that is so big it can't respond to these concerns. And so, in frustration, families turn to us and ask for our help. And then in frustration we are unable to sometimes provide the help that we'd like to. And so it seems to me that you need an independent, individual voice out of our legislative branch of government to oversee activity in the State Department of Social Services and other departments dealing with children's programs. And for not very much money we, together as members of the Legislature, would better be able to serve citizens of this state in trying to meet their concerns and resolve the problems that we have affecting children in our state service system. So with that, I'd like to ask for your support for the advancement of the bill. The bill itself is on Final Reading. This A bill, I would hope, would be able to be advanced to join