

another bill that was introduced in response to the findings of the Child Protection Commission established by the Governor and the Director of the Department of Social Services. It, too, regards the statutes in terms of child abuse and neglect investigations and is an attempt, again, to improve the handling of these cases specifically related to the responsibilities of the guardian ad litem, and again I will go through section by section and explain what this is attempting to do. Section 1 makes it clear that in the case that a county judge is not available, the clerk magistrate may appoint the guardian ad litem. This does not mean that they, the clerk magistrate, would override the county judge jurisdiction. It just allows for the fact that in some counties the judges are not there on a frequent basis and for that reason we've had quite a delay in the appointment of a guardian ad litem for the protection and advocacy of the child. Section 2 just clarifies that the...there shall be an appointment of a guardian ad litem as soon as the child is removed from their home. Some judges do this now, but not all of them and this bill recommends that they...or administrators that they shall appoint a guardian ad litem as soon as the child is removed. What has happened is the children are removed and it may be some time before the case is actually begun and so there is no one in that time period that is advocating for the child and this is an attempt to make sure that it is understood that this can be done. Section 3 refers to the adjudication time lines and mandates that an adjudication hearing be done within 90 days of the petition filing. Previously, there has been the time span of six months. This bill still allows you to go in and request an extension of that period time if you can show good cause for it going on much longer than the 90-day period. The reason for doing this is that we can move more quickly to get a plan in place on behalf of the child who may be at risk. This also says that the cases must be reviewed at least once every six months. It also makes it possible for certain kinds of conversations to be done by phone, that they must be recorded, of course, but again this is to allow for the fact that in many circumstances the judges are only in a county as often as one day a month and that's been one of the causes of significant delays in moving along in these cases. Section 4 makes it clear that the Department of Social Services is supposed to send any kind of a report filed with the court to the guardian ad litem. What has happened in the past is guardian ad litem are not always kept up-to-date about the location of a child or what's been going on with a child and their family and, for that reason, the guardian ad litem has not