

HB 863 -- Child Witness Protection Act

Sponsor: Dixon

This bill establishes the Child Witness Protection Act that applies to children 14 years of age or younger who are testifying in any judicial proceeding. In its main provisions, the bill:

(1) Requires the court to ensure that the oath be given to a child in a manner that the child may fully understand his or her duty to tell the truth, that questions are stated in a form which is appropriate for the age of the child, and that questions are explained to the child if necessary in order for him or her to understand;

(2) Requires the court to allow the child to testify at a time of day when the child is best able to understand the questions asked of him or her and to allow testimony to be limited in duration;

(3) Allows the child when testifying to have a comfort item, upon motion and if all parties agree, such as a toy, blanket, or similar item;

(4) Allows the child to have a support person present and in close proximity during his or her testimony to provide emotional support, upon motion and if all parties agree. The support person must abide by the rules established by the court;

(5) Requires the court to prevent intimidation or harassment of the child by the parties or attorneys; and

(6) Allows the court to order comfortable accommodations for the child which can include adjusting the courtroom layout, conducting the proceedings outside of a courtroom, or relaxing the formalities of the proceedings.