

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2604

As Reported By House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to the hiring of school nurses.

Brief Description: Allowing school nurses not to be certificated employees.

Sponsors: Representatives Brough, Dorn, B. Thomas, Dyer, Eide and Talcott.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Education, February 4, 1994, DPS.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 15 members: Representatives Dorn, Chair; Cothorn, Vice Chair; Brough, Ranking Minority Member; Brumsickle; Carlson; G. Cole; Eide; Hansen; Holm; Karahalios; J. Kohl; Patterson; Pruitt; Roland and L. Thomas.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 3 members: Representatives B. Thomas, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; G. Fisher and Stevens.

Staff: Robert Butts (786-7111).

Background: Schools are responsible for a number of health-related activities, such as screening for scoliosis, evaluating children's hearing and vision, reporting child abuse, and responding to emergencies.

These health-related activities are often the responsibility of certificated school nurses. To receive an initial school nurse certificate, one must be a licensed registered nurse (RN), hold a baccalaureate degree in nursing, and have completed at least 15 post-baccalaureate credits in education, nursing, or health sciences. These requirements are currently under review by the state Board of Education.

Current law specifically allows second class school districts to employ public health nurses.

Some school districts have hired classified health aides or health technicians to perform health-related activities in schools.

Summary of Substitute Bill: Beginning with the 1995-96 school year, first class school districts shall maintain a ratio of at least one certificated school nurse for every 2,500 FTE students.

School districts may hire classified health care providers, such as practical nurses and health aides. However, the classified staff must be supervised by a certificated school nurse.

School districts are encouraged to have at least one school nurse or classified health care provider in each school building.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The substitute bill removes original language that prohibited the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the state Board of Education from requiring that nurses be certificated. Provisions are added regarding the nurse/student ratio, classified health care providers, and language that encourages schools to have a health care provider in each building.

Fiscal Note: Requested on substitute February 4, 1994.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: School health staff are being required to administer more medicine, deal with many more fragile kids, counsel students on substance abuse, and provide anger management training. There is not enough staff to do all these things. As a result, school secretaries end up with many of these tasks, which poses serious liability concerns.

School districts need more flexibility in who they hire. In some situations, classified staff can effectively meet the health needs of students.

Testimony Against: While we have too few nurses now, can we afford this? Schools will be required to lay off teachers to hire more nurses.

Witnesses: Representative Brough (prime sponsor); Marsha Chiasson, (pro); Janet Rowe, Association of Washington School Personnel (pro); Liz Merten and Charla Dunham, Washington State Nurses Association and School Nurse Organization of Washington (pro); Susan Patrick,

Superintendent of Public Instruction (pro); Dwayne Slate, Washington State School Directors' Association (con); and Cheryl Dillon and Lynn McKinnon, Public School Employees (pro).