
Housing Committee

ESSB 5959

Brief Description: Providing assistance to individuals and families who are homeless or at risk of being homeless.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Hargrove, Kilmer, Shin, Sheldon, Kohl-Welles, Delvin and McAuliffe).

<p align="center">Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creates the Transitional Housing Operating and Rent (THOR) Program to assist homeless individuals and families secure and retain housing.

Hearing Date: 1/31/08

Staff: Robyn Dupuis (786-7166).

Background:

Transitional Housing Operating and Rent (THOR) Program

The Transitional Housing Operating and Rent (THOR) program has operated within the Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development (DCTED) since 1999, however it is not a program currently in statute. The program is the result of a decision of the Washington State Supreme Court mandating that the DCTED and the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) create the Homeless Families with Children Plan and provide services to assist homeless children and their families. In 1999 the Legislature included a budget proviso of \$5 million for the 1999-2001 biennium to fund the program that became known as THOR, as well as several other initiatives to help homeless families with children. The THOR funding has remained consistent at \$5 million each biennium since 1999.

THOR Activities

Under the THOR program, the DCTED distributes funds to counties based upon the homeless funding formula used by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The counties and their service providers choose a "lead agency" which may provide THOR services itself and may also subcontract with other service providers in the area.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Services available through THOR include rental assistance, operating subsidies for transitional housing facilities, and case management.

The DCTED has established limits for the percentage of funding that can be used for each activity as follows:

- up to 50 percent may be used for operating subsidies for transitional housing facilities;
- up to 100 percent may be used for rental expenses (including rental vouchers, utilities and moving expenses); and
- up to 40 percent may be used for case management services.

THOR Eligibility: Only families with children and with a household income at or below 50 percent of the area median income are eligible to receive THOR services.

THOR Results: The THOR client data is reported to the DCTED twice a year and a follow-up survey is conducted with past program participants between 6 and 18 months following their exit from the program. In state fiscal year 2007, 1,563 families received THOR services and 571 exited the program. Of those exiting, 70 percent achieved permanent housing and of those families, 47 percent obtained unsubsidized housing. It is estimated that the THOR program is meeting approximately 24 percent of the need of families with children for transitional housing assistance and services.

Although the DSHS/DCTED Homeless Families with Children Plan ceases to be required after January 2007, the DCTED intends to continue operating the THOR program and will report on its achievements in the state's Homeless Housing Strategic Plan which is updated annually.

Offender Housing Landlord Civil Liability

The 2007 Legislature passed ESSB6157 which addressed provisions that affected offenders leaving confinement. Part VI of the bill dealt with housing provisions and established that a landlord who rents to an offender is not liable for civil damages arising from the criminal conduct of the tenant if the landlord:

- (a) discloses to residents of the property that he or she rents or has a policy of renting to offenders; and
- (b) takes steps to report or halt criminal activity if the landlord has actual knowledge of criminal activity on the landlord's premises.

Summary of Bill:

The THOR program is created in the DCTED to assist homeless individuals and families secure and retain housing. The DCTED provides grants to eligible organizations to provide housing related assistance to eligible program participants. Eligible organizations include nonprofit agencies, local governments, housing authorities, and indian tribes. The DCTED encourages organizations to have a quality management system and submit an application to the Washington State Quality Award program.

THOR Activities

Organizations receiving THOR funding must use the monies for:

- (a) rental assistance;
- (b) case management services;
- (c) operating expenses of transitional housing facilities that serve homeless families with children; and

(d) organizational administrative costs (within limits prescribed by the DCTED).

THOR Eligibility: The following are eligible for THOR services if they are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless and if they are willing to participate in a housing stability plan:

- (a) families with children who have household incomes at or below 50 percent of the median family income;
- (b) individuals or families without children who have household incomes at or below 30 percent of the median family income;
- (c) individuals or families with an adult member who has a mental health or chemical dependency disorder; and
- (d) individuals or families with an adult member who is an offender released within the past 18 months.

THOR Reporting

Data on program participants must be entered in to the Washington homeless client management information system.

The DCTED must include an annual THOR report in its state Homeless Housing Strategic Plan. The report must include specific performance measures related to the accomplishment of self-sufficiency for participants, program financial performance, quality of information on participants, and program participant satisfaction.

THOR Account

A non-appropriated THOR account is created.

Repeal of 59.18.600

The statute, RCW 59.18.600, which exempts landlords who rent to released offenders from liability from civil damages arising from tenant criminal conduct (under certain conditions) is repealed.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.