

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESSB 6468

As Passed House:
March 2, 2010

Title: An act relating to coordinating the weatherization and structural rehabilitation of residential structures.

Brief Description: Coordinating the weatherization and structural rehabilitation of residential structures.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Environment, Water & Energy (originally sponsored by Senators Kauffman, Rockefeller, Pridemore, Berkey and Kline).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Local Government & Housing: 2/22/10 [DP];

Capital Budget: 2/26/10 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/2/10, 64-33.

Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill

- Renames the Low-Income Weatherization Assistance Account to the Low-Income Weatherization and Structural Rehabilitation Assistance Account.
- Expands various statutes under the Low-Income Residential Weatherization Program to include structural rehabilitation assistance in addition to weatherization assistance.
- Requires the Department of Commerce to prioritize the allocation of funds from the Low-Income Weatherization and Structural Rehabilitation Assistance Account to projects that utilize funding from related federal energy efficiency programs.
- Requires the Department of Commerce to develop policies to ensure that cost-effective investments are made within the Low-Income Residential Weatherization Program.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT & HOUSING

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.

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Simpson, Chair; Nelson, Vice Chair; Miloscia, Springer, Upthegrove, White and Williams.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Angel, Ranking Minority Member; DeBolt, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Fagan and Short.

Staff: Becca Kenna-Schenk (786-7291) and Ethan Moreno (786-7386).

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CAPITAL BUDGET

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 14 members: Representatives Dunshee, Chair; Ormsby, Vice Chair; Warnick, Ranking Minority Member; Pearson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Blake, Chase, Hope, Jacks, Maxwell, McCune, Morrell, Orwall, Smith and White.

Staff: Nona Snell (786-7153).

Background:

In 1987 the Legislature established the Low-Income Residential Weatherization Program (Program) to assist low-income households in achieving monetary and energy savings through the application of energy efficiency measures in qualifying residences. The Program, which is commonly known as the Energy Matchmakers Program, matches dollar for dollar contributions from local utility or local government sponsors and allocates the funds to local weatherization agencies. Weatherization services provided under the Program include activities such as installing insulation, closing air gaps that allow heat to escape, and modifying heating systems to improve efficiency.

The Department of Commerce (Department) administers the Program and is responsible for allocating funds from the Low-Income Weatherization Assistance Account to local weatherization agencies. When allocating Program funds, the Department must give preference to low-income households at or below 125 percent of the federally established poverty level. The Department must also, to the extent feasible, ensure a balance of participation in terms of: (1) geographic regions of the state; (2) types of fuel used for heating; (3) owner-occupied and rental residences; and (4) single family and multifamily dwellings. In addition, the funds must be allocated for weatherization projects that identify and correct health and safety programs for residents, create family-wage jobs in the construction or energy efficiency sectors, and leverage environmentally sustainable technologies.

Summary of Bill:

The Low-Income Weatherization Assistance Account is renamed as the Low-Income Weatherization and Structural Rehabilitation Assistance Account (Account). Various statutes pertaining to the Program are expanded to include requirements for structural rehabilitation assistance. Definitions that are not referenced in the statutes pertaining to the Program are removed.

The Department is required to prioritize the allocation of funds from the Account to projects that utilize funding from related federal energy efficiency programs, including projects that maximize energy efficiency and extend the life of a home. When possible, the Department must consider local and state benefits, including pledged sponsor match and available funds from other sources, when allocating funds from the Account. In addition, the Department is required to develop policies to ensure that cost-effective investments are made within the Program that maximize energy savings and extend the life of a home.

Service providers receiving Account funds are required to report to the Department at least on a quarterly basis, the project costs and the number of dwelling units being weatherized or rehabilitated.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Local Government & Housing):

(In support) This is a simple bill that allows for the structural repair of low-income homes in addition to weatherization and energy efficiency improvements already occurring under the state Program. For example, if a window needs to be replaced in order to improve energy efficiency, it makes sense to identify any structural repairs that need to be addressed prior to putting in the new window. This bill would allow Program funds to cover the cost of necessary structural repair in order to more effectively weatherize the home. The bill was amended in the Senate to clarify that the intent of the bill is also to seek federal matching funds for weatherization and energy efficiency projects. This bill is extremely important for the low-income housing communities, including residents of both rental housing units and owner-occupied units. The bill should not be amended to only provide weatherization funding to owner-occupied units. If funding for rental units is to be restricted, it would be better if the Department set a limit on the number of repairs for rental units. Program funding, as well as utility and federal funding, has historically funded improvements on both rental and owner-occupied properties.

(Opposed) None.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Capital Budget):

(In support) The addition to make minor structural repairs to the weatherization program makes sense.

The bill from last year addressed apprentice utilization and prevailing wages, which are answers to quality assurance. The committee should consider these again.

Community action agencies provide weatherization services and believe the change to the program will help keep people in their homes and will help utility companies meet energy conservation and carbon reduction goals.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying (Local Government & Housing): Senator Kauffman, prime sponsor; and Dave Finet, Opportunity Council.

Persons Testifying (Capital Budget): Terry Tilton, State Building and Construction Trades Council; and Seth Dawson, Washington State Association for Community Action.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Local Government & Housing): None.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Capital Budget): None.