

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6849

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Ways & Means, March 3, 2010

Title: An act relating to consolidating forecast functions.

Brief Description: Consolidating forecast functions.

Sponsors: Senators Pridemore and Zarelli.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Ways & Means: 2/08/10, 3/03/10 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6849 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Prentice, Chair; Fraser, Vice Chair, Capital Budget Chair; Tom, Vice Chair, Operating Budget; Zarelli, Ranking Minority Member; Brandland, Carrell, Fairley, Hobbs, Honeyford, Keiser, McDermott, Murray, Oemig, Parlette, Pflug, Pridemore and Schoesler.

Staff: Jenny Greenlee (786-7711)

Background: The Economic and Revenue Forecast Council (ERFC) develops the revenue forecast for the state four to five times a year. The forecast is formally adopted by a council of six individuals, two appointed by the Governor and four from the largest political caucuses in the Senate and House of Representatives. The revenue forecast is typically developed by analyzing data from state and national economic trends and data from revenue generating agencies such as the Department of Revenue.

Additionally, the Caseload Forecast Council (CFC) is responsible for developing forecasts for the changing caseloads in state entitlement programs. The caseload forecast is also formally adopted by a council of six individuals, two appointed by the Governor and four from the largest political caucuses in the Senate and House of Representatives. The caseload forecast is developed using entitlement program data, such as programs in the Department of Social and Health Services and the Department of Corrections (DOC).

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.

The Sentencing Guideline Commission (SGC) was created as an independent state agency in the mid-1980s to establish and refine sentencing guidelines. The agency has two primary functions, data collection on sentencing trends and making sentencing guideline recommendations. The agency works with a commission comprised of 20 voting members representing judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, law enforcement, city and county officials, and the public. Four legislators serve on the commission as non-voting members.

Summary of Bill: The bill as referred to committee not considered.

Summary of Bill (Recommended Substitute): The ERFC and the CFC are consolidated into one agency, the Forecast Council. A consolidated council is created by adding one member to the ERFC and renaming it to the Forecast Council. All of the current caseload forecasting activities are retained and moved into the existing ERFC statute.

The SGC is eliminated as a state agency. All forecasting, data analysis, and trending functions are moved to the newly created Forecast Council. The 20-member commission and all associated policy development functions are contained within the DOC. The SGC is no longer responsible for evaluating the effectiveness of existing disposition standards, reviewing the guidelines related to confinement of minor and first time offenders, or reviewing the current sentencing standards for adverse impacts on the sentencing outcomes of racial and ethnic minority youth.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 5, 2010.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on July 1, 2010.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This measure will save money to the state by consolidating administrative functions and other efficiencies. There are other benefits as well from bringing economists together. The state will gain from sharing best practices, intellection interaction, and economies of scale. They will be able to move together than separate.

CON: This proposal will take away the independent nature of the SGC and separates it from the its data. This proposal will cost the state money and the Legislature will lose service provided by the SGC. The commission helps keep a lid on sentencing. Washington State is 44th in the nation for incarceration rates and one reason is that the commission can provide independent advice on sentencing. Judges cannot participate if SGC is moved into DOC because of conflicts of interest. DOC isn't the right place because a majority of those incarcerated are in jails and juvenile facilities, not DOC.

OTHER: The CFC has not had a chance to take a position on this bill.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Arun Raha, Economic and Revenue Forecast Council.

CON: Jean Soliz, SGC; Lonnie Johns Brown, Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs.

OTHER: John Steiger, CFC.