

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5867

As of January 18, 2022

Title: An act relating to compassionate and effective strategies to address the homelessness crisis.

Brief Description: Concerning compassionate and effective strategies to address the homelessness crisis.

Sponsors: Senators Fortunato and Kuderer.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Housing & Local Government: 1/19/22.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Authorizes counties and cities with a population of more than 50,000 to establish an emergency overnight shelter within its jurisdiction.
- Requires such counties and their eligible cities to coordinate to ensure there are a sufficient number of shelter beds available to accommodate at least the number of sheltered and unsheltered homeless according to the most recent point-in-time count.
- Authorizes each shelter to prohibit possession or use of alcohol and unprescribed drugs on the premises, but must make available employment, mental health, and drug counseling services on site.
- Requires each shelter to provide security during operating hours.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING & LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Staff: Brandon Popovac (786-7465)

Background: *Martin v. City of Boise* (2018). In 2017, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals

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heard arguments regarding a Boise, Idaho ordinance banning people from sleeping outdoors on public property. In 2019, the court held that any ordinance that imposes criminal sanctions against homeless individuals for sleeping outdoors on public property when no alternative shelter is available, and the enforcement of such ordinance, violates the 8th Amendment of the United States Constitution prohibiting cruel and unusual punishment. The ruling applies to nine Western states, including Washington, and was denied review by the United States Supreme Court in December 2019. Some cities have taken steps in response to the court decision to address sleeping or camping on public property.

Emergency Shelters and Point-In-Time Counts. Emergency shelters are typically operated by public or private, nonprofit entities or religious organizations and only allow occupancy during the day or overnight, but sometimes both. Some are considered high-barrier shelters by having certain requirements for residents, such as mandatory curfews, mandatory sobriety or prohibition of on-site use of illegal substances, or both, and mandatory treatment or program services participation. Some are considered low-barrier with no requirements as to sobriety or use of illegal substances or participation in program services.

Each year the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Washington State require a statewide count, also known as a point-in-time (PIT) count, of all persons staying in temporary housing programs, including a sheltered count and an unsheltered count—places not meant for human habitation. The Department of Commerce provides survey forms for counties and agencies to use for their counts. Counties can opt to use their own forms as long as the count complies with state guidelines.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, HUD and Washington State allowed communities to choose not to conduct an unsheltered count in 2021, but the regular sheltered count was still required. The 2022 annual PIT count is scheduled for the night of Thursday, January 27, 2022.

Housing Trust Fund. Established in 1986, the Washington Housing Trust Fund (HTF) program provides grants or loans to help communities develop and preserve affordable housing to meet the needs of low-income and special needs populations. Since 1986, the HTF has awarded over \$1 billion in funding and helped build or preserve over 50,000 units of affordable housing statewide.

One of the statutorily authorized activities eligible for assistance from the HTF and other legislative appropriations includes shelters and related services for the homeless, including emergency shelters and overnight youth shelters.

Summary of Bill: Every county and each city with a population over 50,000 may establish and operate at least one emergency overnight shelter site in its respective jurisdiction. Counties and eligible cities within the county's geographic boundary must coordinate to ensure there are enough cumulative shelter beds to accommodate, at a minimum, the sheltered and unsheltered portions of the county's most recent PIT homeless count.

Each emergency overnight shelter must make available employment, mental health, and drug counseling services on site, subject to funding, and provide security during shelter operating hours.

Each emergency overnight shelter may prohibit the possession and use of alcohol and unprescribed drugs on its premises, contingent upon evaluation for and compliance with treatment as recommended.

Any emergency overnight shelter established is eligible, and must be prioritized, for assistance under the HTF.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 17, 2022.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

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