

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 6540

As Reported By House Committee On:
Health Care

Title: An act relating to the release of addicted infants from hospitals.

Brief Description: Conducting a study of drug-exposed infants born in health care facilities.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Health & Long-Term Care (originally sponsored by Senators Prentice and Owen).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Health Care: 2/22/96 [DP].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Dyer, Chairman; Backlund, Vice Chairman; Hymes, Vice Chairman; Cody, Ranking Minority Member; Murray, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Casada; Conway; Crouse; Morris; Sherstad; Skinner and H. Sommers.

Staff: John Welsh (786-7133).

Background: The Washington State Board of Health estimates that 10 to 15 percent of all births in this state are to mothers who use alcohol and illegal drugs during pregnancy. That means there are 8,000 to 10,000 of these infants born each year. Babies who are born drug-exposed must be withdrawn from the substance right after birth if they are going to survive. The withdrawal process interrupts the baby's ability to suck, sleep, and relax, as the child is given lower doses of the substance until the addiction is broken. Depending on the substance, this period is extremely difficult for the baby and could last several weeks.

Some health care providers in the community are concerned that drug-exposed infants are being released to their homes before completing the withdrawal process. It is feared that in some cases the mothers are being given opiates and other substances to administer at home to the baby during the final phases of the withdrawal process.

Summary of Bill: The Department of Health is directed to conduct a study of the number of infants born who are drug-exposed. The study must include information on how the infants are treated and make recommendations on what types of facilities should care for them during withdrawal. The study must also discuss the issue of breast feeding while the mother is still addicted. A report to the Legislature is due by July 1, 1997, with findings and recommendations.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 20, 1996.

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

Testimony For: Infant drug addiction is a serious problem that should be addressed.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Susie Tracey, Washington State Medical Association; Sean Maloney, Pediatric Interim Care Services; and Dr. Jeanette Stehr-Green, Washington State Department of Health.