

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESSB 6398

As Passed House:

February 26, 1996

Title: An act relating to background checks of employees at the special commitment center.

Brief Description: Providing for background checks of employees at the special commitment center.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Human Services & Corrections (originally sponsored by Senators Hargrove, Long and Oke; by request of Department of Social and Health Services).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Children & Family Services: 2/15/96, 2/20/96 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/26/96, 95-0.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Cooke, Chairman; Lambert, Vice Chairman; Stevens, Vice Chairman; Tokuda, Ranking Minority Member; Brown, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Buck; Carrell; Dickerson; Patterson and Sterk.

Staff: Douglas Ruth (786-7134).

Background: The Special Commitment Center in Monroe houses 34 sexual predator offenders. The Department of Social and Health Services operates the center and employs approximately 50 employees at the center. Until 1995, the center conducted background checks of all persons being considered for employment. However, this changed last year when the department transferred all the developmentally disabled residents at the center to other locations. Because the department derived its authority to conduct background checks from statutes regulating the housing of developmentally disabled individuals, this transfer terminated the center's ability to investigate applicants for employment. Due to this unforeseen effect of the transfer, the center today employs six to 10 individuals whose backgrounds have not been checked.

Summary of Bill: Authority to conduct background checks of persons being considered for employment at the Special Commitment Center is returned to the department. The checks will be the same as those performed by the Department of Corrections and include a record check through the Washington State Patrol and FBI criminal identification systems.

In addition to prospective employees, the department is also authorized to conduct background checks of the backlog of employees who were not previously checked because of the department's loss of authority in 1995 to conduct such checks.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: Restoring the special commitment center's authority to conduct background checks is important to ensure the safety of the employees and residents of the center as well as the employees of the Monroe corrections institution insofar as the center is located within that institution. The statute does not give the center authority to perform periodic or random background checks, just checks at the point of employment.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: (Pro) David Weston, Department of Social and Health Services.