

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6540

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Health & Long-Term Care, January 31, 1996

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

Brief Description: Restricting the release of addicted infants from hospitals.

Sponsors: Senators Prentice and Owen.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Health & Long-Term Care: 1/29/96, 1/31/96 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6540 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Quigley, Chair; Wojahn, Vice Chair; Deccio, Fairley, Franklin, Moyer, Thibaudeau, Winsley and Wood.

Staff: Rhoda Jones (786-7198)

Background: The Washington State Board of Health estimates that 10-15 percent of all births in this state are to mothers who use alcohol and illegal drugs during pregnancy. That means there are 8,000-10,000 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 Babies who are born drug-exposed must be withdrawn from the substance right after birth if they are going to survive.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.

There is concern by some health care providers in the community 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 Substitute Bill: The Department of Health is directed to conduct a study of the number of infants born who are drug-exposed. The report must include information on how the infants are treated and make recommendations on what types of facilities should care for them during withdrawal. The report must discuss the issue of breast feeding while the mother is still addicted.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The original bill made discharging drug-affected newborns unlawful. The substitute authorizes a study to review the overall problem of drug addicted infants.

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: Lisa Thatcher, WSNA (concerns); Margaret Casey, WSCC.