

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6559

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Ecology & Parks, January 26, 1996

Title: An act relating to developing and maintaining a state-wide benchmarks system.

Brief Description: Studying the feasibility of developing and maintaining a state-wide benchmarks system.

Sponsors: Senators Fraser, Swecker, Hochstatter, Kohl, Fairley and Franklin.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Ecology & Parks: 1/24/96, 1/26/96 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ECOLOGY & PARKS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6559 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Fraser, Chair; Fairley, Vice Chair; McAuliffe, Spanel and Swecker.

Staff: Susan Ridgley (786-7444)

Background: Benchmarks are a tool to quantitatively measure progress towards a common goal. They have been used in the private sector for many years. In the last five years, other states have been using benchmarks as a yardstick to measure progress, or the lack of it, in reaching economic, education and human capital goals. These indicators assist policymakers in shaping state and local policies to improve economic, environmental and social climates, and to communicate those results to the general citizenry.

Benchmarks are usually developed and tracked in four main policy areas: economic development, community/quality of life, education and workforce skills, and environmental sustainability. A number of past efforts in Washington have strived to develop statewide goals, and in some instances benchmarks. Examples of these are alternatives for Washington, the Washington Business Roundtable's Principles for Prosperity, Environment 2010, and Washington Works Worldwide. Currently, numerous citizen groups or community alliances are working at the local level to develop and track benchmarks, such as Sustainable Seattle, Pierce County Benchmark Program, City of Bellingham Benchmarks for Progress, Olympia's Sustainable City Program and the Willapa Bay Alliance. The Washington Performance Partnership, a program authorized by the Legislature last session, is working with state agencies to improve current government performance and accountability through goal-setting and tracking.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The Legislature recognizes the importance of measuring progress towards achieving sustainable economic, environmental and human resource development goals. A feasibility study is authorized, to be completed by the UW's Institute of Public Policy and Management. The study is to:

- (1) Examine past and present efforts, in Washington and other states, to develop benchmark or performance indicators;
- (2) Look at existing state statutes and plans for inherent conflicts or convergence in their goals;
- (3) Assess the level of interest in the concept with affected parties; and
- (4) Lay out a process whereby statewide benchmarks could be developed and tracked over the long term. This includes looking at obstacles to the use of benchmarks, and a variety of different approaches on how they could be most effectively used.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: In addition to minor grammatical changes, the substitute bill acknowledges two other bills. SB 6680, if passed, will repeal the Washington Performance Partnership, so a reference to the partnership is deleted. SB 6618, if passed, will develop economic benchmarks; SSB 6559 is not intended to conflict with that measure.

Appropriation: \$30,000.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: Benchmarks could be an important element of the long-term planning effort in Washington State. The Legislature should carefully think through how best to use benchmarks; feasibility study is a good idea.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Paul Sommers, NW Policy Center-UW (pro); Robert Allen, Pierce Co. Dept. of Community Services (pro); Dennis Taylor, Center for Sustainable Living-YMCA (pro).