

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5118

As Reported By House Committee On:

Education

Title: An act relating to truancy petitions.

Brief Description: Changing school truancy petition provisions.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Education (originally sponsored by Senators McAuliffe, Hargrove, Winsley, Long and Sheldon).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 4/4/97 [DP].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Johnson, Chairman; Hickel, Vice Chairman; Cole, Ranking Minority Member; Keiser, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Linville; Quall; Smith; Sterk; Sump; Talcott and Veloria.

Staff: Joe Hauth (786-7111).

Background: As part of the 1995 "Becca Bill" (S 312 L 95), the Legislature enacted provisions that require schools to file a petition in juvenile court when a student accumulates at least five, and not more than seven unexcused absences in a month, or 10 unexcused absences in a year. If the allegations in the truancy petition are established by a preponderance of the evidence, the court must assume jurisdiction to intervene for the remainder of the school year. The court may order the student to attend school, or be referred to a community truancy board. If the student fails to comply with the court's order, the court can impose a variety of sanctions, including detention, fines, or community service.

Summary of Bill: The length of the court's jurisdiction over a truant student is changed from the end of the school year to a period of time necessary to cause the student to return and remain in school. The list of actions that a court may order for a student subject to a truancy petition is expanded to include requiring the student to submit to drug or alcohol testing.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: The Becca Bill has been improved over the last couple years. Currently a child can get through the school year and then nothing happens. This bill says if you are truant, something will happen. The provisions in the bill will provide useful tools for the courts. The Becca Bill has been very significant in increasing attendance. Jurisdiction will be expanded, and will provide a big hook for taking us forward in stopping truancy.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Barbara Mertens, Washington Association of School Administrators; Martha Hardin, Superior Court Judges Association; and Joanne Lawson, Tacoma Public Schools.