

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5281

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Environmental Quality & Water Resources, February 12, 1999

Title: An act relating to the permit assistance center.

Brief Description: Changing provisions relating to the permit assistance center.

Sponsors: Senator T. Sheldon.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Environmental Quality & Water Resources: 1/22/99, 2/12/99 [DPS-WM].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY & WATER RESOURCES

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5281 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Fraser, Chair; Eide, Vice Chair; Morton, Honeyford, Jacobsen, McAuliffe and Swecker.

Staff: Richard Ramsey (786-7412)

Background: The Legislature established the Permit Assistance Center within the Department of Ecology (DOE) in 1995 to provide assistance to businesses and public agencies in complying with the state's environmental quality laws. The center functions as a clearinghouse for information on environmental permits and, when requested, may function in a coordination role for specific projects. The 1995 legislation provided for sunset of the center on June 30, 1999.

In a sunset review of the center, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee: (1) found that DOE had complied with the Legislature's intent in establishing the center and in implementing the coordinated permit process; (2) made recommendations for improving the center's efficiency and effectiveness including modifying the center's reporting requirements; and (3) recommended re-authorizing the center.

Following the 1998 session a Joint Legislative Task Force reviewed rural land use and economic development issues. Related to the Permit Assistance Center, the task force recommended: reauthorizing the center; redirecting its focus toward small business assistance and rural economic development activities; and establishing Permit Assistance Center field offices in the Department of Ecology's regional offices.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The permit assistance center is reauthorized. The Department of Ecology is directed to establish regional permit assistance centers. The center is directed to work cooperatively with local government, businesses, and individuals to develop and

disseminate information about the center to potential projects to locate in rural areas and to make a biennial report on the status of rural cooperation.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The "duties" of the Permit Assistance Center are expanded:

- The center must work cooperatively with rural ventures (moved from Section 6 of the original bill);
- Reporting requirements are changed from annual to biennial; and
- A reporting requirement on the status of cooperation with rural ventures is added.

Changes to RCW 90.60.800 (reporting requirements), RCW 90.60.010 (findings and declaration), RCW 90.60.020 (definitions) and the three-year reauthorization are removed. A repeal of sunset of the center is added.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 20, 1999.

Effective Date: June 30, 1999.

Testimony For: The Permit Assistance Center has met its statutory mandate and should be reauthorized. Consistent with the recommendations of the Joint Task Force on Rural Land Use and Economic Development the center should redirect its focus toward small business assistance and rural economic development activities by establishing Permit Assistance Center field offices in the Department of Ecology's regional offices.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Senator Tim Sheldon (pro); Gordon White, Department of Ecology (pro).