
**Children & Family Services
Committee**

HB 2473

Brief Description: Revising provisions for the governance of the Washington state school for the deaf.

Sponsors: Representatives Tokuda, Boldt, Dickerson, Kenney, Ogden, Chase, Dunn, Veloria, McDermott and Fromhold; by request of Governor Locke.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Increases the powers and duties of the Board of Trustees at the Washington School for the Deaf (WSD).
- Reduces the power of the superintendent of the WSD to reflect the increased power of the Board of Trustees.

Hearing Date: 2/4/02

Staff: Tracey Taylor (786-7196).

Background:

The Legislature established the Washington School for the Deaf (WSD) in 1886. The primary purpose of the school is to educate and train hearing-impaired children ages 3 through 21. The WSD is located in Vancouver and students who are not from the area may live on-campus in a cottage or dorm during the week.

The WSD is one of 50 agencies that report directly to the Governor, who appoints the superintendent. The school has a board of trustees that provides advice to the superintendent. The WSD staff members report to the superintendent and are employees of the State of Washington.

The Board of Trustees is composed of 13 members. The voting trustees representing the 9 congressional districts are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate. There are 5 exofficio members, including a representative of the parent-staff organization, a representative of the classified staff designated by their exclusive bargaining representative, a

representative designated by the WSD teachers' association and the president of the Washington State Association for the Deaf. Trustees serve terms of 5 years.

The Board of Trustees role is advisory in nature. Their powers and duties include:

- Studying and recommending comprehensive programs of education and training;
- Reviewing the admissions policy;
- Recommending candidates for the position of superintendent;
- Completing a biennial evaluation of the superintendent for the Governor;
- Recommending to the Governor that the superintendent may be removed for misfeasance, malfeasance or willful neglect of duty; and
- Participating in development of, and monitor the enforcement of the school's rules and regulations.

During the past few years, a series of physical and sexual assaults has allegedly occurred at the WSD and over a half-dozen lawsuits have been filed against the State of Washington for alleged physical and sexual abuse that occurred at the school. In 2000, the Legislature passed SSB 6361 to address some of the concerns by providing training, to students and staff, and allowing the school to refuse to enroll adjudicated Level III sex offenders. In February 2001, another alleged sexual assault occurred at the WSD.

In the spring of 2001, the Governor commissioned a review of the school's governance structure and the residential program. Dr. Kenneth D. Randall, the Superintendent of the Arizona State School for the Deaf and Blind, authored the report on the WSD governance structure and made several recommendations for the Governor to consider. In the summer of 2001, the Governor directed the superintendent of WSD to implement certain safety initiatives based on the findings of the two reports. The Governor also appointed a 6 member Safety Changes Monitoring Panel to assist the superintendent and the school in implementing the safety initiatives.

Summary of Bill:

The powers and duties of the Board of Trustees at the WSD are increased. The Board of Trustees will:

- Evaluate the superintendent on an annual basis, including a recommendation regarding the on-going retention of the superintendent;
- Submit a biennial state-of-the-school report;
- Approve the school's budget and funding requests;
- Approve and monitor the implementation of the school's policies, rules and regulations;
- Approve the school's academic and residential program designs.

The superintendent's powers and duties are reduced to reflect the increased power of the Board of Trustees.

The superintendent will act as the executive secretary of the board.

The Board of Trustees may meet as frequently as necessary.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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