

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESB 5381

As Reported by House Committee On:
Higher Education

Title: An act relating to the Washington academy of sciences.

Brief Description: Authorizing an independent, nonprofit Washington academy of sciences.

Sponsors: Senators Kohl-Welles, Parlette, McAuliffe, Pridemore, Rockefeller, Brown, Rasmussen, Schoesler, Shin, Haugen, Schmidt, Keiser and Kline; by request of Governor Gregoire.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 3/22/05, 4/1/05 [DPA].

Brief Summary of Engrossed Bill
(As Amended by House Committee)

- Directs the presidents of the University of Washington and Washington State University to serve as co-chairs of an organizing committee to create a Washington Academy of Sciences (Academy) and file articles of incorporation by April 30, 2007.
- Establishes the purpose of the Academy as an independent organization that serves as the principal source of scientific investigation, examination, and reporting on scientific questions referred to it by the Governor and the Legislature.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Kenney, Chair; Sells, Vice Chair; Cox, Ranking Minority Member; Rodne, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Buri, Fromhold, Hasegawa, Jarrett, Ormsby, Priest and Roberts.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Dunn.

Staff: Barbara McLain (786-7383).

Background:

The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) was created in 1863 as a private, non-profit society of distinguished scholars engaged in scientific research. The purpose of the NAS is to

investigate, examine, experiment, and report on any subject of science whenever called upon to do so by a department of the government. Since its creation, the NAS has expanded to include the National Research Council, National Academy of Engineering, and the Institute of Medicine. Collectively these four organizations are known as the National Academies. The academies are intended to provide a public service by working outside the framework of government to ensure independent advice on matters of science, technology, and medicine.

There are private, non-profit state academies of science in at least 40 states, intended to promote scientific education and research. The size, organization, and mission of state academies varies. Some offer consultation and advice on matters of science and technology at the request of state agencies and departments. Other typical activities include convening annual conferences and symposia, publishing newsletters or scientific journals, providing grants to support research, supporting youth science programs, and operating science museums.

Summary of Amended Bill:

The presidents of the University of Washington and Washington State University are directed to form and serve as co-chairs of an organizing committee to create a Washington Academy of Sciences (Academy). The committee will investigate organizational structures for the Academy to ensure participation of scientists and experts with distinction in their fields and ensure broad participation among various disciplines. The organization structure also must include a process for the Academy to respond to inquiries, including identifying findings from previous or current research.

The co-chairs are to form the committee by January 1, 2006, and complete its review by April 30, 2007, at which time the committee will file articles of incorporation to create the Academy as an independent organization. The articles will: (a) recognize the responsibility of the Academy to provide investigative services at the request of the Governor and the Legislature; (b) provide for a board of directors that includes distinguished scientists from various disciplines and provides a balance of representation from academic, private, governmental, and research sectors; and (c) provide for all appropriate and necessary powers to carry out the Academy's purposes. The committee will also recommend procedures and funding requirements to support the Academy's programs in a report due to the Governor and legislative committees by April 30, 2007.

The purpose of the Academy is to serve as a principal source of scientific investigation, examination, and reporting on scientific questions referred to it by the Governor and the Legislature. The Academy will investigate, examine, and report on any subject of science requested by the Governor, the Governor's designee, or the Legislature. Procedures for selecting panels of experts will be set forth in the Academy's bylaws or operating guidelines. In forming review panels, the Academy will attempt to assure that panel members have no conflicts of interest and require disclosure of any related advocacy positions or financial interest held in the previous 10 years.

The Governor will provide funding to the Academy for the actual expense of investigations, examinations, and reports. This funding is in addition to any state funding assistance the Academy receives in its initial years of operation. The Academy may also provide services to its members and the public such as public education programs, newsletters, websites, science fairs, and research assistance.

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill:

Two additional references to the Legislature's ability to request investigations by the Academy are inserted.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: The first academy was the NAS created by Abraham Lincoln. Many states have academies of science, established as nonprofit organizations. Washington should also have an academy. It is particularly important to have the Governor and the Legislature drawing upon the expertise and prestige of such a collection of scientists to investigate important public policy issues. An academy would be a truly objective, truly independent way to get information to make better decisions. It would enhance the public's trust in government. We have some of the best minds in the country, but we need an administrative infrastructure to access that expertise, with oversight to ensure accountability and objectivity. It makes sense to have the Legislature also request inquiries. We would assume that such a request would be supported by funding to conduct the inquiry.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Jeanne Kohl-Welles, prime sponsor; and Keith Phillips, Office of the Governor.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.