

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 6287

As Reported by House Committee On:
Transportation

Title: An act relating to special parking privileges for legally blind persons.

Brief Description: Authorizing special parking privileges for the legally blind.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Transportation (originally sponsored by Senators Fairley, Thibaudeau and Shin).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Transportation: 2/20/06, 2/23/06 [DPA].

**Brief Summary of Substitute Bill
(As Amended by House Committee)**

- Adds blindness to the list of disabilities for which the director of the Department of Licensing shall grant special parking privileges.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 26 members: Representatives Wallace, Vice Chair; Woods, Ranking Minority Member; Skinner, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Appleton, Buck, Clibborn, Curtis, Dickerson, Ericksen, Flannigan, Hankins, Holmquist, Hudgins, Jarrett, Kilmer, Lovick, Nixon, Rodne, Schindler, Sells, Shabro, Simpson, B. Sullivan, Takko, Upthegrove and Wood.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Murray, Chair and Morris.

Staff: David Munnecke (786-7315).

Background:

The Department of Licensing is required to grant special parking privileges to any person that has a disability that limits or impairs the ability to walk and meets one of the following criteria, as determined by a licensed physician or an advanced nurse practitioner:

- cannot walk further than 200 feet without stopping to rest;
- is severely limited in the ability to walk due to arthritic, neurological, or orthopedic condition;

- is so severely disabled that the person cannot walk without an assistive device;
- uses portable oxygen;
- is restricted by lung disease to a particular extent;
- is impaired by cardiovascular disease or cardiac condition to a particular extent; or
- has a disability resulting from acute sensitivity to automobile emissions that impairs the ability to walk.

Other states have added conditions that do not involve limits or impairments to the ability to walk to the list of disability that merit the granting of special parking privileges.

Summary of Amended Bill:

The list of criteria qualifying for special parking privileges is expanded to include legal blindness.

Legally blind is defined as someone who: (a) has no vision or whose vision with corrective lenses is so limited that the individual requires alternative methods or skills to do efficiently those things that are ordinarily done with sight by individuals with normal vision; or (b) has an eye condition of a progressive nature which may lead to blindness.

The Legislature reaffirms that legal blindness does not affect the physical ability to walk or the ability to participate and contribute in employment and all aspects of life as an equal and productive citizen. The Legislature also finds that certain individuals, including the newly blind and those in transition into blindness, could benefit from special parking privileges if they chose to avail themselves of the opportunity.

Technical changes are also made to the existing statutory language to remove obsolete language and conform to respectful language guidelines.

Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill:

In the amended bill, the Legislature reaffirms that legal blindness does not affect the physical ability to walk or the ability to participate and contribute in employment and all aspects of life as an equal and productive citizen. The Legislature also finds that certain individuals, including the newly blind and those in transition into blindness, could benefit from special parking privileges if they chose to avail themselves of the opportunity.

Appropriation: None.**Fiscal Note:** Available.**Effective Date of Amended Bill:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: (In support) Traversing large parking lots is dangerous, and it can be difficult to find a given vehicle without guidance. Granting special parking privileges allows a driver of a legally blind person to go about their business while the legally blind individual goes about theirs. Granting special parking privileges to the legally blind also helps those with age-related sight issues. Legal blindness is considered a disability, and granting special parking privileges would help people to maintain their independence.

Testimony Against: (Opposed) This bill is contrary to sound public policy. A properly trained blind person can navigate parking lots and other locations. Granting special parking privileges to the legally blind perpetuates the stereotype of the helplessness of the blind and thus negatively affects the image of the blind. This negative impression of the blind could become a greater barrier to employment. Skills training and fear are the only issues that affect mobility for the legally blind.

The people in wheelchairs and others with significant mobility issues are the ones who will really be affected by this bill. They need the wider spaces that are used by those with special parking privileges. Adding the blind to the list of people eligible for special parking privileges will mean less parking for others in the short term and greater construction costs in the long term.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Zandra Brown; Barbara Sainitzer; and Skip Dreps, Northwest Chapter Paralyzed Veterans of America.

(Opposed) Denise Mackenstadt, Visually Impaired People of Sequim; Gary Mackenstadt, Bob Sellers, and Kay Burrows, National Federation for the Blind; Toby Olsen, Governor's Committee on Disabilities; and Denise Colley, Washington Coalition of the Blind.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: (Opposed) Bennett Prows, National Federation for the Blind.