

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2596

As Reported By House Committee On:
State Government

Title: An act relating to state government.

Brief Description: Requiring computer network distribution of legislative materials.

Sponsors: Representatives Finkbeiner, Orr, Johanson, Eide, Kessler, B. Thomas, Shin, Long, Caver, Bray, Pruitt, Moak, Springer, Cothorn, J. Kohl, L. Johnson and Anderson.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
State Government, February 1, 1994, DPS.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Anderson, Chair; Veloria, Vice Chair; Reams, Ranking Minority Member; L. Thomas, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Campbell; Conway; Dyer; King and Pruitt.

Staff: Kenneth Hirst (786-7105).

Background: In 1993, a pilot program within the legislative branch for providing on-line access to legislative information was established.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The joint Legislative Service Center is directed to make the following information available to the public in electronic form: legislative calendar, schedule of legislative committee hearings, list of matters pending on the floors of both houses of the Legislature, list of the committees of the Legislature and their members, text of bills in each current legislative session, legislative history of bills, status of bills, bill reports prepared by legislative committees, vote information concerning each bill in each current legislative session, veto messages, Washington State Constitution, and session laws enacted on or after January 1, 1994. This information is to be made accessible to the public through nonproprietary, nonprofit cooperative public computer networks.

The information in the legislative information system must be available to the public in the shortest feasible time after it is available to the system. Other information must be available in the shortest feasible time after it is available to the Chief Clerk of the House and the Secretary of the Senate.

The state is prohibited from imposing a fee for accessing the information. Personal information concerning a person who accesses the information may be maintained only for the purpose of providing service to the person.

The joint Legislative Systems Committee shall ensure implementation by the center and report to the Legislature on the status of implementation by October 1, 1994.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The substitute bill makes the Legislative Service Center responsible for providing the information rather than, as in the original bill, the Chief Clerk of the House and the Secretary of the Senate. The substitute bill eliminates the requirement that the information be provided in ASCII US text but requires it to be made accessible to the public by way of a nonproprietary, nonprofit public network. The substitute bill also places reporting and other requirements on the joint Legislative Systems Committee.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: (1) Public, computer access to legislative information need not wait for the information highways of the future; junior high students are currently providing it to persons requesting it state-wide by way of a computer bulletin board they have established at school. The state should be providing that access. (2) The public is eager for this information; an article in a Seattle paper regarding the students' project overloaded their telephone access lines with requests. (3) Providing the information through a public, nonproprietary network is the most cost effective way of serving large numbers of people. (4) The bill lets ordinary people access legislative information in a timely way without their having to join political action committees or other political groups. (5) This bill is the first step in giving people access to government. It is particularly important for people with disabilities.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: In Favor: Representative Finkbeiner, Prime Sponsor; Mark Laughlin and Greg Halgren from Lake Washington School District; Vincent Polling; Ron Johnson; Vince Callaway, Gen Star Information Services; Larry Hampson; Jeffrey Michka, Coalition of Washington Communities; and Ray Hansen.