

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1874

As Reported By House Committee On:
State Government

Title: An act relating to creating the department of emergency services.

Brief Description: Creating the department of emergency services.

Sponsors: Representatives Anderson, Reams, R. Meyers, Jones, Sheldon, Hansen, Orr and Kessler.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
State Government, March 3, 1993, 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; Vance, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Campbell; Conway; Dyer; King; and Pruitt.

Staff: Bonnie Austin (786-7135).

Background: Prior to 1986, the Department of Emergency Management and the State Fire Protection Board existed as two separate state entities. In 1986, they were consolidated into divisions of the Department of Community Development (DCD).

The Division of Emergency Management within DCD is responsible for coordinating all state emergency management activities. This includes activities relating to the state comprehensive all-hazard emergency management plan, the statewide enhanced 911 emergency communications network, search and rescue operations, emergency assistance to disaster victims, and hazardous waste emergency response. The Emergency Management Council advises the governor and director of DCD on emergency management matters.

The Division of Fire Protection Services within DCD is responsible for coordinating activities relating to fire protection response and training. The State Fire Defense

Board is responsible for creating a fire services mobilization plan that coordinates local, state, and regional resources for large-scale fire response, and for providing for reimbursement of fire districts that incur expenses under the plan. The State Fire Protection Policy Board is responsible for establishing a comprehensive policy for state fire protection services, including a state fire protection master plan, arson control programs, and training and educational programs.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The House State Government Committee and the Senate Government Operations Committee will conduct an interim study of the governance of fire protection and emergency management services. The study may include whether the two divisions should be merged to create a separate agency and whether alternative funding sources should be developed. The committees will report on their recommendations by January 1, 1994.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The original bill created a new Department of Emergency Services funded by an insurance premium tax. The substitute bill deletes all of this and instead mandates an interim study of whether this is needed and if so, how it should be funded.

Fiscal Note: Requested February 16, 1993.

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

Testimony For: These two divisions have not received a high enough priority within DCD. The fire protection master plan has been put on the back burner. Funds have been cut. If this bill is not passed, the competency of fire fighters will degrade and the safety of citizens will be put at risk. Arson investigation and prosecution has not been funded. Local governments have borne all the costs of investigating the recent outbreak of arsons. Only one state inspector was assigned to the Arson Task Force, and that was only for a month or two. The cities support this new department. DCD does a good job with its other local programs, but not these two. Funding for the Fire Protection Board has been cut every year. DCD plays the white hat role with locals, but these programs are sometimes the black hat role. The state is not prepared to deal with a major emergency or disaster.

Testimony Against: These are important programs, but the insurance tax is an inappropriate funding source. These programs are important enough to be funded from the general fund. A dedicated fund is inappropriate. Other states will retaliate against domestic insurance companies, and require that they pay a higher rate in other states. This tax is

also being tapped in other bills. Insurance policies cover far more than fire-related events. Insurance taxation needs to be stable. Keep Washington a good environment for the insurance industry. The existing premium tax goes into the general fund. Insurance companies also pay an assessment to cover their cost of being regulated by the insurance commissioner.

Witnesses: Pete Spiller, Washington Fire Commissioners (pro); T.J. Nedrow, Washington State Firefighters Association (pro); Gordon Walgren, Washington State Fire Chiefs (pro); Richard Eastman, Snohomish County #7 Arson Task Force (pro); Pat Jollota, Fire Protection Policy Commission (pro); Ron Haworth, Fire Protection Policy Board (pro); Lyn Gross and Bill Lokey, Washington State Emergency Management Association (pro); Don Krupp, Washington State Department of Community Development (neutral); Paul O'Connor, Fire Advisory Board of Puget Sound. Jean Leonard, State Farm Washington Insurers (concerns); Dan Wolfe, Safeco (con); Mike Kapphahn, Farmers Insurance (con); and Mel Sorensen, National Association of Independent Insurers (con).