

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 6164

As Reported By House Committee On:
Agriculture & Rural Development

Title: An act relating to rural economic development.

Brief Description: Concerning economic development in rural areas.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Trade, Technology & Economic Development (originally sponsored by Senators Sheldon, Bluechel, Skratek, Williams, Erwin and M. Rasmussen).

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Agriculture & Rural Development, February 23, 1994, DP.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 9 members:
Representatives Rayburn, Chair; Kremen, Vice Chair;
Chandler, Ranking Minority Member; Schoesler, Assistant
Ranking Minority Member; Chappell; Grant; Karahalios;
McMorris and Roland.

Staff: Kenneth Hirst (786-7105).

Background: The Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development was created through the merger of the Department of Community Development and the Department of Trade and Economic Development.

In 1987 the Legislature directed the Department of Community Development and the Utilities and Transportation Commission to investigate the feasibility of introducing office intensive industry into agriculturally-based rural areas and to develop recommendations for informing rural communities about telecommunications and computer applications to various enterprises. The department and the commission submitted their report to the Governor and the Legislature the following year. The 1987 legislation also directed the commission to provide the Legislature with a biennial report on the status of the telecommunications industry in this state, including the quality and extent of the state's telecommunications infrastructure. These reports were required by statute through 1991 only.

Summary of Bill: The Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development must serve as an advocate of telecommunications policies which further rural economic development goals. It must develop strategies to: increase awareness of the linkages between telecommunications and rural economic development; educate rural communities and small business on the uses of telecommunications services; integrate a telecommunications component into small business assistance and local capacity-building efforts; ensure that work forces in rural communities are trained to meet the telecommunications needs of rural businesses; and assist rural communities, hospitals and small businesses aggregate demand to acquire telecommunications services unavailable to them individually.

The department is to consider sponsoring, in cooperation with the Utilities and Transportation Commission, regional workshops to share information about innovative uses of telecommunications and identify the telecommunications needs of rural communities. The department must work with the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges to develop telecommunications training courses.

Fiscal Note: Requested February 21, 1994.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect July 1, 1994.

Testimony For: (1) Tele-medicine and tele-radiology are technologies available now and can greatly assist rural patients in getting the highest quality analyses available anywhere. Local communities will be well served by having a hospital work force aware of the telecommunications services available to hospitals. (2) The years 1994-1995 will witness historic changes in telecommunications law at the federal level. It will benefit communities to be aware of the new services available to them.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: Senator Sheldon, prime sponsor; Rob Menaul, Washington State Hospital Association; and Dale Vincent, US West Communications.