

SENATE BILL REPORT

SCR 8427

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Higher Education, February 4, 2000

Brief Description: Forming a joint select committee on fire suppression in student residence halls.

Sponsors: Senators Kohl-Welles, Long, B. Sheldon, Goings, Patterson, Eide, Prentice, Jacobsen and Brown.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education: 2/2/2000, 2/4/2000 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Kohl-Welles, Chair; Shin, Vice Chair; Bauer, Horn, Jacobsen, McAuliffe, Sheahan and B. Sheldon.

Staff: William Bridges (786-7424)

Background: Under the State Building Code, higher education dormitories are congregate residences.— Since 1989, new congregate residences three or more stories high or having an occupant load of 20 or more must have automatic sprinkler systems.

According to a recent article in USA Today, there are about 1,700 fires each year in U.S. college dormitories and fraternity or sorority houses. Since 1980, 17 persons have died in such fires, the most recent tragedy occurring at Seton Hall University, where three students died in a dormitory without automatic sprinklers.

Summary of Bill: A Joint Select Committee on Fire Suppression in Student Residence Halls is created. The committee has three duties. First, to investigate the lack of automatic fire extinguishing systems in student residence halls owned or operated by institutions of higher education. Second, to review the actions of other jurisdictions across the country that have addressed the issue of retrofitting higher education student residence halls with automatic fire extinguishing systems. And third, to recommend to the Legislature and Governor the ways government, fire protection services, institutions of higher education, and the private sector can work cooperatively to reduce the financial and administrative burdens on retrofitting existing higher education student residence halls with automatic fire extinguishing systems.

The committee consists of eight voting members, two from each caucus of the Senate and House of Representatives to be appointed by the President of the Senate and Co-Speakers of the House of Representatives, respectively. The State Fire Marshal is an ex-officio nonvoting member.

Senate Committee Services and the Office of Program Research provide staffing to the committee. All expenses and hiring of additional staff are subject to legislative approval.

The committee reports its findings and recommendations to the Legislature by January 1, 2001.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Testimony For: The Seton Hall fire was well publicized, but three days later another fire occurred in a 100-year-old college dormitory in Ohio. The dormitory had been retrofitted with sprinklers so no one died. Washington State University recently retrofitted its high-rise dormitories so this is something other schools can do. A joint legislative committee is a good means of studying this issue because it can consult a wide variety of technical experts.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: PRO: Paul O'Connor, Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board of Puget Sound; Rick Slunaker, Associated Gen. Contractors of WA.