

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 1127

As of March 20, 2015

Title: An act relating to the agricultural labor skills and safety grant program.

Brief Description: Creating the agricultural labor skills and safety program.

Sponsors: House Committee on Labor (originally sponsored by Representatives Chandler and Sells).

Brief History: Passed House: 3/06/15, 90-8.

Committee Activity: Agriculture, Water & Rural Economic Development: 3/17/15.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, WATER & RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Staff: Bonnie Kim (786-7316)

Background: The Department of Commerce (Department) administers a number of programs with the goal of enhancing and promoting sustainable community and economic vitality in Washington. Both Senate and House bills have been introduced in recent years to create an agricultural training grant program. Those bills were not enacted; however, the Legislature provided funding in the state's operating budget for agricultural training.

In the 2007-09 Operating Budget, the Legislature appropriated \$500,000 from the state general fund as pass-through funding to the Opportunities Industrialization Center, a nonprofit organization, to provide agricultural workers farm skills, English as a second language, and other skills training. The Legislature appropriated \$500,000 in the 2009-11 Operating Budget, \$424,000 from the Accident Account and \$76,000 from the Medical Aid Account, to the Department of Labor and Industries (L&I) to implement a community agricultural worker safety grant. The Legislature required L&I to enter into an interagency agreement with the Department of Agriculture to implement the grant. The Legislature did not fund the grant program in the 2011-13 Operating Budget.

Summary of Bill: The Legislature recognizes that providing skills and safety training for agricultural workers helps ensure worker success and safety, and benefits Washington's agricultural industry. Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the Department must create and administer the Agricultural Labor Skills and Safety Grant Program.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

The Department must select one grant recipient with a community-based organization able to work with agricultural employee and employer organizations to provide workforce skills and safety training to agricultural workers. The Department must ensure the grant recipient gives priority to Washington workers. The grant recipient must:

- design and implement an agricultural skills program;
- provide voluntary health and safety training;
- develop a plan to increase the number of skilled agricultural workers through a recruitment process;
- evaluate trainings and service delivery strategies for agricultural workers and employers;
- partner with employee and employer organizations that have been focused on agricultural labor and employment issues and services for at least ten years and have experience training agricultural employees; and
- use a training delivery system sensitive to the needs of agricultural employees and employers.

The grant recipient may receive up to \$1 million per year. The provisions creating the grant program expire July 1, 2018.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Washington has three of the top ten agriculture counties in the U.S. It is in the entire state's interest that Washington continues to be a national leader in agriculture. This bill will help workers go from having a job to having a career. Agricultural skills are becoming more sophisticated. Agriculture is an integral part of Washington's economy. We need to upgrade the skills of our workers to meet the needs of the industry. We face language and educational challenges in training our workforce. Employers cannot find qualified employees to operate equipment or work more technology-oriented jobs. This bill would build a safety network across the state to support the health and safety of our agricultural workers.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Chandler, prime sponsor; Michael Gempler, WA Growers League; Phyliis Gutierrez Kenney, Seamar Community Health; Gilbert Alaniz, Seamar Health.

Persons Signed in to Testify But Not Testifying: No one.