

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5376

As Passed House - Amended:

February 26, 2022

Title: An act relating to promoting awareness of the governor's office of the education ombuds.

Brief Description: Promoting awareness of the governor's office of the education ombuds.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Early Learning & K-12 Education (originally sponsored by Senators Wilson, C., Wellman, Conway, Das, Hunt, Kuderer, Lias, Nobles and Saldaña).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 3/12/21, 3/23/21 [DPA], 2/17/22, 2/24/22 [DPA].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/26/22, 94-1.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill (As Amended by House)

- Requires public schools and institutional education providers to take specified actions to notify students, families, and employees about the services available through the Office of the Education Ombuds (OEO).
- Directs the OEO to develop a template of the required notification information and to translate the template into Spanish and other languages as resources allow.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Santos, Chair; Dolan, Vice Chair; Ybarra, Ranking Minority Member; Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Berg, Bergquist, Callan, McCaslin, McEntire, Ortiz-Self, Rude, Steele and Stonier.

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

Staff: Megan Wargacki (786-7194).

Background:

Office of the Education Ombuds.

In 2006 the Office of the Education Ombuds (OEO) was created within the Office of the Governor to provide information to parents, students, and others regarding their rights and responsibilities with respect to the state's public elementary and secondary education system and to advocate on behalf of students. It is the lead agency for providing resources to families about public school antiharassment policies and strategies. All matters are treated as confidential by the OEO, except as necessary to perform the duties of the office.

The OEO describes its role as: listening to concerns and addressing questions about the public education system; using informal conflict resolution tools to support collaborative problem solving and promote education justice; providing coaching, facilitation, training about family and community engagement, and systems advocacy; and collecting data and identifying trends to guide its education policy recommendations.

The OEO produces an annual report describing the work of the office and making recommendations to increase family and community involvement in public education and to improve educational opportunities for all students.

Education Providers.

Public schools are the common schools within school districts, charter schools, state-tribal compact schools, and other publicly funded institutions of learning with a curriculum below college level.

Institutional education providers are school districts, educational service districts, and other entities providing education services to youth residing in institutional education facilities, such as juvenile detention centers.

Summary of Amended Bill:

Beginning August 1, 2023, public schools and institutional education providers must provide students and their parents or guardians with a description of the services available through the Office of the Education Ombuds (OEO) at the time of initial enrollment or admission.

Also, beginning August 1, 2023, public schools must either: include on their website a description of the services available through the OEO and a link to the website of the OEO, or provide a description of the services available through the OEO and the contact information for the OEO in existing materials that are shared annually with families, students, and school employees, such as welcome packets, orientation guides, and newsletters. Public schools are encouraged to perform both of these actions.

By July 1, 2022, the OEO must a template of the required notification information. The OEO must also translate this template into Spanish and include other languages as resources allow. The template must be made available upon request and updated as needed.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The Office of the Education Ombuds (OEO) was established by the Legislature to reduce opportunity gaps and promote family engagement. It does this by providing conflict resolution services, which are independent, impartial, and collaborative. It brings student and family voices to policy settings so that decision makers consider their experiences. It also provides workshops, trainings, and outreach, which are preventative tools to reduce the cost of conflict in schools and ensure that students are not out of school.

There is a gap between parents who have the privilege of knowing where to get help and parents who do not have that access. Many people do not know about the OEO, and when they do learn about the OEO, it is often through a friend or an Internet search, but not from the schools. People have positive interactions with the OEO and benefit from its resources. People who find out about the OEO often wish they had known about the OEO when they were in crisis.

During the pandemic, the OEO received many calls from families asking for these resources and supports in multiple languages. The resources of the OEO are particularly needed during this time when schools are trying to recover from the pandemic and to reengage students. This bill creates equitable access and provides notice of the OEO services.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Claire Wilson, prime sponsor; Carrie Basas, Governor's Office of the Education Ombuds; and Samantha Fogg, Seattle Council Parent Teach Student Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.