SENATE BILL REPORT
SHB 2368

As of February 19, 2024

Title: An act relating to assisting refugees and immigrants by describing the role of the office of refugee and immigrant assistance within the department of social and health services in administering federal funding regarding refugee support services and authorizing the office of refugee and immigrant assistance within the department of social and health services to administer services to immigrants.

Brief Description: Assisting refugees and immigrants.

Sponsors: House Committee on Human Services, Youth, & Early Learning (originally sponsored by Representatives Gregerson, Eslick, Thai, Low, Senn, Leavitt, Davis, Farivar, Nance, Reed, Doglio, Ramel, Simmons, Ormsby, Street, Goodman, Timmons, Pollet and Santos).

Brief History: Passed House: 2/13/24, 61-35.
   Committee Activity: Human Services: 2/19/24.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Codifies the Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance within the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS).

- Designates DSHS as the lead state agency responsible for the development, review, and administration of the Washington State plan for refugee settlement.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Staff: Alison Mendiola (786-7488)

Background: The Office of Refugee Resettlement provides benefits and services to assist the resettlement and local integration of specific eligible populations, and in most cases,

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spouses and unmarried children under 21 of those holding such statuses.

The Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance in the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) provides services through local government, community and technical colleges, refugee resettlement agencies, ethnic community based organizations, and other service provider agencies. Services are available only to individuals and families that qualify for federal Refugee Resettlement Services.

Refugee Cash and Medical Assistance provides up to 12 months of cash assistance for newly arrived refugees and eligible humanitarian immigrants who are single or married adults and ineligible for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. Provides up to 12 months of medical assistance for newly arrived refugees and eligible humanitarian immigrants who are ineligible for Modified Adjusted Gross Income Medicaid or Classic Medicaid.

Summary of Bill: The Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance is codified within DSHS. DSHS is to coordinate statewide to support the economic and social immigration and basic needs of immigrants and refugees arriving and resettling in Washington. DSHS is to coordinate with local, state, federal government agencies and other stakeholders.

DSHS is designated as the lead state agency responsible for the development, review, and administration of the Washington State plan for refugee settlement. DSHS is to submit the state plan to and seek approval from the federal Office of Refugee Settlement within the federal Department of Health and Human Services.

DSHS shall provide refugee cash assistance, refugee medical assistance, and refugee support services in accordance with the federal act and state plan. The refugee support services may include employment services, English language instruction, case management, and other services or assistance consistent with the federal act.

DSHS may administer services to immigrants for who are ineligible for federal services. DSHS may contract with external entities, including community-based organizations, to provide services. In contracting with community-based organizations, DSHS must engage communities impacted to determine an equitable funding distribution and contracting process.

Immigrant means a person who has arrived in the United States and the state of Washington from another country seeking residence who is not a naturalized citizen.

Refugee means a person admitted into the United States under Section 207 of the Immigration and Nationality Act and others who are ineligible for federal Refugee Resettlement Services under federal law.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 14, 2024.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This bill will help align state resources. ORIA has been in existence since the 1970s, Washington was considered a leader. Families now have different backgrounds and needs. People urgently need our assistance now whether we want it or not. A church in Tukwila has been the epicenter of providing support for asylees but no longer has the capacity to meet the current needs. People are sleeping outside in tents. This regional humanitarian crisis shouldn't fall only on local shoulders. We need statewide leadership for a growing humanitarian crisis. This bill will provide both short-term relief and also lay the groundwork to welcome refugees and asylees in the future. We need to codify ORIA to be a good neighbor.

CON: The non-zero fiscal note is alarming, defies legal standards. This is a national security crisis, we don't know what the bill is going to be.

OTHER: This bill expands the agency's authority to serve newcomers. For more than 40 years the agency has been serving refugees and receives federal funding to do so. For the past two years this has been an expansion of those seeking refuge in Washington.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Mia Gregerson, Prime Sponsor; Eli Goss, OneAmerica; Thomas McLeod, City of Tukwila; Kristin Ang, Faith Action Network (FAN).

CON: Reni Storm; Janet Baker.

OTHER: Babs Roberts, Department of Social and Health Services, Economic Services Administration; Sarah Peterson, Department of Social and Health Services, Economic Services Administration.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: PRO: Thomas McLeod, City of Tukwila.