

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6273

As of February 3, 2024

Title: An act relating to conducting an audit of the juvenile rehabilitation system.

Brief Description: Conducting an audit of the juvenile rehabilitation system.

Sponsors: Senators Boehnke, Dozier, Gildon and Wilson, C..

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services: 1/25/24, 1/30/24 [DPS-WM].
Ways & Means: 2/03/24.

Brief Summary of First Substitute Bill

- Requires the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee to conduct an audit of the juvenile rehabilitation system.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6273 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Wilson, C., Chair; Kauffman, Vice Chair; Boehnke, Ranking Member; Frame, Nguyen, Warnick and Wilson, J..

Staff: Kelsey-anne Fung (786-7479)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Staff: Sarian Scott (786-7729)

Background: Juvenile Rehabilitation Institutions. On July 1, 2019, the Juvenile Rehabilitation division (JR) transferred from the Department of Social and Health Services

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.

to the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF). JR operates two secure residential facilities for juveniles who are convicted of crimes and serving more than 30 days of confinement. The Echo Glen Children's Center in Snoqualmie serves younger males and female juveniles. The Green Hill School in Chehalis serves older male juveniles.

JR also operates eight community residential facilities which allow youth to begin transitioning back to the community. These facilities provide treatment, education, and vocational services. To be eligible for placement at a community residential facility a youth must be placed on minimum security status.

Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee. The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) is a statutorily created body consisting of eight members from the Senate and eight members from the House of Representatives, with not more than four members from each house from the same political party. The nonpartisan staff of JLARC conduct performance audits, program evaluations, tax performance reviews, sunset reviews, and other analyses assigned by the Legislature and JLARC itself.

Summary of Bill (First Substitute): JLARC must:

- review JR's existing processes and staffing methods for determining adequate staffing ratios to meet the confinement and rehabilitative needs of the juveniles and ensure public safety;
- review procedures and protocols for professional development, hiring and recruitment, and training for staff serving youth in JR institutions, with a focus on how staff are trained to implement rehabilitative practices;
- review youth access to programming, treatment, and services including educational programming, treatment and services for youth experiencing substance use disorder, behavioral health treatment, available reentry services such as housing, job training, and other supports, access to technology services, family and community connections, and other programming and services offered to provide youth with rehabilitation and restorative interventions;
- review existing security and safety measures, including use of disciplinary procedures for total isolation and room confinement, and their effectiveness in meeting the unique needs of the juvenile population in the custody of DCYF;
- review how often and how many youth face new juvenile or adult criminal offense charges, convictions, or both while residing at JR institutions and potential future consequences that may occur as a result such as sentence extension, likelihood of recidivism, health impacts, and effects regarding criminal records;
- assess gender equity regarding education, employment, and career options for female youth;
- review how staffing impacts youth on youth conflict and safety;
- review best practices from other states regarding security and safety measures, programming opportunities, reentry supports, staff training and professional development, and staffing ratios, and identify options that may be feasible to adopt in Washington State to increase public safety and the security, programming options,

- treatment services, and rehabilitation mission of DCYF's JR institutions;
- review existing processes for responding to critical incidents, including communication and cooperation with local law enforcement, and identify areas for improvement; and
- review the impacts of changes in average daily population, longer lengths of stay, longer sentences, increases in maximum age of release, increases in more serious offense types and adult sentences, and related effects of JR to 25 legislation.

JLARC must report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature by June 30, 2026. The report must include recommendations on supporting JR's efforts to gradually move young people from carceral settings to least restrictive environments to improve positive reentry outcomes.

The bill expires December 31, 2026.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE (First Substitute):

- Expands the scope of the audit to include review of:
 1. staff professional development, hiring and recruitment, and training;
 2. youth access to programming, treatment, and services;
 3. use of disciplinary procedures for total isolation and room confinement;
 4. how often and how many youth face new offense charges while at JR;
 5. gender equity for female youth;
 6. how staffing impacts youth on youth conflict and safety;
 7. best practices from other states regarding programming opportunities, reentry supports, staff training and professional development; and
 8. the impacts of changes related to JR to 25 legislation.
- Requires the report include recommendations on supporting JR's efforts to gradually move young people from carceral settings to least restrictive environments to improve positive reentry outcomes.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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 on Original Bill (Human Services): *The committee recommended a different version of the bill than what was heard.* PRO: This would allow a holistic review of the agency to address any issues in a holistic fashion. This will improve the safety and security of individuals that work at the facilities and the juvenile residents in

the facilities. This review will also make sure the state is in compliance with state and federal laws that have evolved over time, including upgrading building codes, technology, and innovation. There has been a lot of critical incidents in the news recently that are concerning and children in the facilities and the facilities need to be protected.

OTHER: The review should be comprehensive and also focus on the rehabilitative qualities of JR facilities like lack of meaningful treatment for substance use, disciplinary and infraction procedures, use of solitary confinement, and how staff are recruited and trained to have a rehabilitative focus. The review should look at programming and access to education and housing vouchers upon release as part of reentry as well as security and technology needs. There are many challenges with providing and developing developmentally appropriate opportunities especially as the population gets older and comes with different needs. The review should have a wider lens and give real thought to what JR stands for as focus on rehabilitation and therapeutic support is disappearing.

Persons Testifying (Human Services): PRO: Senator Matt Boehnke, Prime Sponsor; Kateta Demmings, Kids Are Kids.

OTHER: Karen Pillar, TeamChild; Allison Krutsinger, Dept of Children, Youth, and Families.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Human Services): No one.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on First Substitute (Ways & Means): This bill addresses many concerns for individuals working in our JR centers. This bill will focus on current staffing ratios and security protocols, which is a top concern for folks working there.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Senator Matt Boehnke, Prime Sponsor; Nicole Gomez, Washington Federation of State Employees.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Ways & Means): No one.