

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 6377

AS PASSED SENATE, FEBRUARY 14, 1992

Brief Description: Modifying provisions for the awarding of TDD distribution and maintenance contracts.

SPONSORS: Senate Committee on Energy & Utilities (originally sponsored by Senator Thorsness)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY & UTILITIES

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6377 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Thorsness, Chairman; Jesernig, Roach, Stratton, and Sutherland.

Staff: Phil Moeller (786-7445)

Hearing Dates: January 30, 1992; February 6, 1992

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY & UTILITIES

BACKGROUND:

In 1987 the Legislature enacted a program to distribute state-owned devices to the hearing-impaired community that allow these citizens to communicate through the telecommunications network. These devices are referred to as "Telecommunications Devices for the Deaf" or "TDDs," and include a range of equipment such as simple amplifiers, machines with a keyboard that also provides text readout, and machines for citizens who are both deaf and blind.

This program also authorized a statewide relay system for hearing-impaired to communicate with the hearing community, through a group of third-party interpreters. This system became operational in November, 1989.

The Legislature reauthorized this program in 1990 and extended it to the speech-impaired. Later in 1990, Congress enacted and the President signed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a measure that required all states to eventually develop relay services similar to the Washington program.

Federal requirements for these relay systems, both in the ADA and in directives from the Federal Communications Commission, affect the future of the established relay system in Washington. In response to this uncertainty, in 1991 the Legislature created a task force to provide recommendations on the future of the relay service. The task force reported to the Legislature in December, 1991, with nine specific recommendations on the future of the relay system.

SUMMARY:

The Office of Deaf Services within the Department of Social and Health Services shall seek certification by the Federal Communications Commission of the statewide relay service for the hearing-impaired and speech-impaired. The Office of Deaf Services (the office) shall award contracts for the operation and maintenance of the relay service for service commencing July 26, 1993. Any entity awarded the contract must be registered as telecommunications company by the Utilities and Transportation Commission prior to final contract approval.

When considering contracts for TDD equipment, the office may consider the quality of equipment and award contracts on a basis other than cost.

The Utilities and Transportation Commission shall provide specific data to the office on the number of access lines in the state for the use of the office in determining the rate of the TDD excise tax.

The TDD advisory committee shall report at least four times per year to the administrators and operators of the statewide relay service on the effectiveness of the program.

Each telecommunications company providing intrastate interexchange voice transmission service shall offer discounts for service used in conjunction with the relay service.

Appropriation: none

Revenue: yes

Fiscal Note: requested January 29, 1992

TESTIMONY FOR:

The bill provides needed changes to conform with the federal Americans With Disabilities Act. This is a necessary service that should be contracted to a qualified entity.

TESTIMONY AGAINST: None

TESTIFIED: PRO: Roger Pendergraft, Washington State Assn. of the Deaf; Leon Curtis, Office of Deaf Services; Lori Beeslow, TDD Program; Matt Burns, TDD Adv. Committee; Ricky Dockter, Tacoma Assn. of Deaf; Bob Bratton, GTE

HOUSE AMENDMENT(S):

Changes in terminology relating to telecommunications devices for the deaf are made throughout the bill.