

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSJR 8208

AS PASSED SENATE, MARCH 4, 1991

Brief Description: Amending the Constitution to permit municipalities and state agencies to employ chaplains.

SPONSORS: Senate Committee on Governmental Operations (originally sponsored by Senators Newhouse, Vognild, Hayner, Gaspard, McCaslin and McMullen).

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Joint Resolution No. 8208 be substituted therefor, and the substitute joint resolution do pass.

Signed by Senators McCaslin, Chairman; Madsen, and Sutherland.

Staff: Martin Lovinger (786-7443)

Hearing Dates: February 7, 1991; February 18, 1991

BACKGROUND:

The Washington State Constitution protects the absolute right of freedom of religion in Article I, Section 11. However, there is a proviso that nothing in Article I forbids the employment by the state of a chaplain for custodial, correctional and mental institutions. There are those who believe that public hospitals also should be able to employ chaplains.

SUMMARY:

Article I, Section 11 does not forbid the employment of a chaplain by a public hospital district's hospital, health facility, or hospice as in the discretion of the Legislature may seem justified.

Appropriation: none

Revenue: none

Fiscal Note: none requested

TESTIMONY FOR:

This bill protects agencies against lawsuits since public hospital districts all over the state hire chaplains. Good medicine includes healing of the spirit. Chaplains are spiritual advisers trained in bereavement counseling.

TESTIMONY AGAINST:

Vastly expanded the number of government entities that can employ chaplains. The problem will worsen as each religious denomination brings pressure to hire its chaplains.

TESTIFIED: Dan Nolta, Tacoma-Pierce County Chaplaincy; Greg Vigdor, Washington State Hospital Association; Jerry Sheehan, American Civil Liberties Union; Dave Broderick, Washington State Hospital Association