

SENATE BILL REPORT

SJR 8208

AS REPORTED BY COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS,
FEBRUARY 18, 1991

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

SPONSORS: Senators Newhouse, Vognild, Hayner, Gaspard, McCaslin and McMullen.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Joint Memorial No. 8208 be substituted therefor, and the substitute joint memorial 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.

SUMMARY:

Article I, Section 11 permits the state, its agencies, political subdivisions, or municipal corporations to employ chaplains for their custodial, correctional, and mental institutions, or hospitals and other health care facilities including hospices.

EFFECT OF PROPOSED SUBSTITUTE:

Article I, Section 11 permits public hospital districts to employ chaplains for their hospitals, health care facilities and hospices.

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