

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2641

As Reported by House Committee On:
Transportation

Title: An act relating to conduct aboard Washington State Ferries.

Brief Description: Implementing a one ticket/one seat policy on Washington State Ferries.

Sponsors: Representatives Rockefeller, Eickmeyer, Woods, Lantz, Haigh, Bailey, Kenney and Edwards.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Transportation: 2/3/04, 2/4/04 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes a policy of one-ticket, one-seat on Washington State Ferries.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 29 members: Representatives Murray, Chair; Rockefeller, Vice Chair; Simpson, G., Vice Chair; Ericksen, Ranking Minority Member; Jarrett, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Armstrong, Bailey, Campbell, Clibborn, Cooper, Dickerson, Edwards, Flannigan, Hankins, Hatfield, Hudgins, Kristiansen, Lovick, Mielke, Morris, Nixon, Rodne, Romero, Schindler, Shabro, Sullivan, Wallace, Wood and Woods.

Staff: Jill Satran (786-7315).

Background:

Ridership on some ferry runs has increased significantly, particularly during commuting hours and on runs where ferry service has been reduced. The Washington State Ferries (WSF) assumes that on auto-ferries some passengers will remain in their vehicles, and therefore it is possible for the number of passengers on the passenger deck to meet or exceed the number of seats available.

Some passengers use the crossing time to rest and may stretch out over two or three seats. While this typically is not a problem, during peak hours it may result in another passenger being denied a seat. The WSF does not currently have any policy or passenger code of conduct discouraging or prohibiting passengers from occupying more than one seat, nor is there any formal mechanism in place for passenger complaints or requests for seating assistance.

Summary of Bill:

The Department of Transportation is directed to adopt rules or policies instituting a one-ticket/one-seat policy on Washington State Ferries.

The policy may allow an individual to use additional seats once the vessel is underway, as long as additional seats are not reserved or blocked from use prior to departure; and no other passenger is denied a seat.

The policy or rules must provide a process for:

1. crew members to help passengers who are looking for a vacant seat;
2. ticket holders to file a complaint and
3. passengers to receive assistance when the passenger is unable to find a seat and another passenger is occupying more than one seat.

The WSF may deny passage to an individual who ignores or abuses the one-ticket/one-seat policy. Notice of this policy must be provided on tickets and on signs posted in the terminal and on vessels.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Testimony For: As ridership increases and boats become more crowded, the competition for seats can get contentious. Some inconsiderate riders make it difficult for others to peacefully enjoy the passage and at times problems have almost escalated to violence. Claiming more than one seat when other riders do not have one would not be tolerated on an airplane or other form of transportation. This legislation is needed because the Department of Transportation does not feel it has the authority to institute this policy absent legislative direction.

(With concerns) Ferry employees are concerned that they may be put in the role of policing on the vessel. It is possible this would interfere with their existing duties.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: Hank Mann-Sykes, citizen.

(With concerns) Gordon Baxter, Inlandboatmen's Union.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.