

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2259

As Reported by House Committee On:
Appropriations

Title: An act relating to compulsory school attendance.

Brief Description: Revising provisions relating to compulsory school attendance.

Sponsors: Representatives Sommers and Fromhold.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Appropriations: 4/22/03, 4/23/03 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Makes truancy petitions under the Becca statutes permissive rather than mandatory.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 15 members: Representatives Sommers, Chair; Fromhold, Vice Chair; Cody; Conway; Dunshee; Grant; Hunter; Kagi; Kenney; Kessler; Linville; McIntire; Miloscia; Ruderman and Schual-Berke.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Sehlin, Ranking Minority Member; Pearson, Asst Ranking Minority Member; Alexander; Boldt; Buck; Clements; Cox; DeBolt; McDonald; Pflug; Sump and Talcott.

Staff: Bernard Dean (786-7130).

Background:

In accordance with the Becca statutes, if a school district is unsuccessful in reducing student absences, the district must file a truancy petition in juvenile court against a student who has seven unexcused absences in any month or 10 unexcused absences in a given school year. If a school district fails to file such a petition, the parent of a child with five or more unexcused absences in any month, or upon 10 unexcused absences in a given school year, may file a truancy petition with a juvenile court. Truancy petitions

are one of three petitions that can be filed under the Becca statutes. School districts and juvenile courts are authorized to create community truancy boards to assist in improving school attendance.

The Governor's 2003-05 biennium budget proposal assumes a general fund savings of \$7.1 million from the elimination of the truancy petition requirements.

Summary of Bill:

All statutes relating to filing truancy petitions under the Becca statutes are made permissive, rather than mandatory, and the operation of community truancy boards is made subject to available funds. Additionally, school districts may file truancy petitions after five unexcused absences in any month during the school year. Mandatory truancy reporting requirements are repealed.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect July 1, 2003.

Testimony For: Funding for truancy petitions for the school side of the equation has been reduced over the years. Those counties that want to make it work can do so under the bill. In others where they can't, they would not be required to do so. If this bill doesn't pass and if it continues to be a mandate, there is no funding in the budget to continue the program. Therefore, it should be permissive. With no funding, the requirements are a very expensive mandate for schools.

Testimony Against: The highest priority for the judges' association is maintaining programs that assist youth. Becca is the highest priority on that list. The association worked to identify ways to save money as an alternative to reducing Becca or Consolidated Juvenile Services. The alternatives that were developed are contained in Senate Bill 5903. About \$7 million would be saved by these options. These are in your budget, but so are the truancy reductions. Becca is the tool that makes this state a leader. It addresses problems associated with runaways, kids that quit school, and kids that might commit crimes later. These students aren't the easiest. If you make the requirements voluntary, there will not be Becca any longer.

Testified: (In support) Bob McMullen, Association of Washington Principals; and Bob Butts, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

(Opposed) Deborah Fleck, Superior Court Judges Association.

