

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5828

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Health & Long-Term Care, March 4, 2003

Title: An act relating to provision of meningococcal immunization information to first-time students by degree-granting postsecondary educational institutions.

Brief Description: Requiring information on meningitis immunization for college students.

Sponsors: Senators Sheahan, Keiser, Regala, Kastama, Thibaudeau, Hale, Fraser and Winsley.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Health & Long-Term Care: 2/27/03, 3/4/03 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5828 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Deccio, Chair; Winsley, Vice Chair; Brandland, Franklin, Keiser, Parlette and Thibaudeau.

Staff: Tanya Karwaki (786-7447)

Background: Meningitis is a bacterial infection causing inflammation of the membranes surrounding the brain and spinal cord. Meningococcal bacteria are transmitted through the air via respiratory secretions and direct contact with infected persons. Common symptoms of meningitis, which can be treated with antibiotics, include high fever, headache, and stiff neck. The disease can result in permanent brain damage, hearing loss, learning disability, limb amputation, kidney failure, or death. A vaccine is available that provides protection against meningitis for approximately three to five years.

The American College Health Association estimates that 100 to 125 cases of meningitis occur annually on college campuses, resulting in five to 15 student deaths. Studies indicate that college freshman, especially those living in dormitories, have a six times higher risk for meningitis than college students overall. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that college freshmen be educated about the availability of a safe and effective vaccine which can decrease their risk of contracting the disease.

Summary of Substitute Bill: Except for community and technical colleges, every degree-granting postsecondary residential campus that provides on-campus or group housing provides information on meningitis to each matriculated first-time student. Community and technical colleges must only provide the information to those students offered on-campus or group housing. The information must include symptoms, risks, and treatment of the disease, as well as information about the vaccination and where the vaccine can be received.

Neither the Department of Health nor the educational institution are required to vaccinate the students.

The Department of Health must be consulted regarding preparing the information materials.

This act does not create a private right of action.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The substitute bill removes the requirements that educational institutions: recommend that first-time students be vaccinated; and track student notification and response concerning the disease. Educational institutions are required, under the substitute bill, only to provide information that meets certain requirements to enrolled matriculated first-time students. An exception is created for community and technical colleges, which must only provide the information to those students who are offered on-campus or group housing. The substitute bill also clarifies that the act does not create a private right of action.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 25, 2003.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: The Centers for Disease Control recommends that college students be given information regarding meningitis. Students that live in dormitories are at a higher risk for contracting the disease. This bill would make Washington a safer place for students to attend higher education institutions.

Testimony Against: There are two major problems with the bill. One, "recommend" requires more than informing the students; whether a student receives the vaccine should be a matter between the student and his or her physician, not the student and the educational institution. Two, tracking the student signatures and information is "busy work" particularly when there is no penalty associated with a lack of compliance.

Testified: Judy McNickle, WWU (con); Tom Woodnult, SBCTC (con); Larry Ganders, WSU (con); Ellen Jensen (con); Steve Lindstrom, James McMahan, WA Student Lobby (pro); Melanie Stewart (pro).