

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6568

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Higher Education, February 5, 2004

Title: An act relating to directing the institute for public policy to develop a proposal for establishing a Washington state women's history center or information network.

Brief Description: Directing the institute for public policy to develop a proposal for establishing a Washington state women's history center or information network.

Sponsors: Senators Fraser, Winsley, Kline, Kohl-Welles, Jacobsen, B. Sheldon, Spanel, Keiser, Franklin and Thibaudeau.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education: 2/5/04 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6568 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Carlson, Chair; Schmidt, Vice Chair; Horn, Kohl-Welles, Pflug, B. Sheldon and Shin.

Staff: Jean Six (786-7423)

Background: According to some people, the state of Washington is recognized as a bellwether state with regard to its efforts to achieve substantial improvements in legal rights and opportunities for women and girls. It is believed there has been no systematic effort to compile this landmark history.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The Washington State Institute for Public Policy undertakes a study and makes recommendations to the 2005 Legislature for the development of a center or an information network to achieve the following: (1) a systematic approach to collect, preserve, maintain, and provide public access to historically valuable records and artifacts of women's history in Washington, (2) a general outline of where these records and artifacts are located and may be accessed, (3) a method for encouraging citizens with historically significant items to preserve them and make them accessible, (4) programs and displays that can tour throughout the state, (5) a way to make material available to the K-12 and higher education systems, (6) promotion of a collection of oral histories, (7) research collection about women's history, and (8) private donations of funds as well as loans or donations of records and artifacts.

The Institute may create an advisory committee or in other ways consult with interested parties that are enumerated.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The emergency clause is deleted and the Washington State Institute for Public Policy "may" undertake a study – more permissive than "shall."

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: There is no depository for the records of many landmark achievements made in the name of women's equity. There needs to be an effort to systematically collect, preserve, and maintain, as well as provide public access to, historically valuable records pertaining to women's history in Washington State. We need both the Women's History Center **and** an information network.

Women have been leaders in all spheres: education, sports, science, religious institutions, medicine, lobbyists, public administration, labor, professions, agriculture, social services, legal and financial rights and more. Many of us are regularly asked: Why has Washington so consistently been a leader for women; how has this come about? We are in danger of losing our ability to answer these important questions.

Many people would appreciate a place to deposit the many boxes of materials stored in basements, attics and garages and those same people would be delighted to donate these letters, minutes, posters and other documents and artefacts to a center specializing in women's history.

Women's suffrage in Washington State was gained a full ten years prior to passage of the 19th Amendment giving women nationwide the right to vote. Washington leads the nation in the number of women legislators – 41 percent in 1999. Today, 23 of the 49 state Senators are women, and 31 members of the 98 member House of Representatives are women. More women are registered to vote than men. Women, more than men, have experienced the changes brought on by their own efforts – the right to vote, the right to credit, the right to own property – these were all "givens" for men in this country.

This is not an exhaustive list. There are many events that mark women's history and the passage of this bill will provide the much-needed common depository of knowledge for the valuable stories and memorabilia that will tell women's history in Washington. We cannot take this history for granted – it was a true struggle that continues in other countries today. This is not a feminist movement, but a human story.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: PRO: Senator Karen Fraser, prime sponsor; Senator Shirley Winsley; co-sponsor; Sue Lean, League of Women Voters; Dorothy Young Sale, self; Liz Pierini, LWV; Joan Cathey, YWCA; Denise Keegan, self