

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5472

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Human Services & Corrections, February 23, 2007

Title: An act relating to a pilot program for family counseling.

Brief Description: Establishing a pilot program for family counseling.

Sponsors: Senators Kastama, Holmquist, Rasmussen, Regala, Marr, Carrell, Hargrove, Roach, Jacobsen, Kilmer, Sheldon, Swecker, Shin, Franklin, Clements and Keiser.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections: 2/08/07, 2/23/07 [DPS, w/oRec].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5472 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Hargrove, Chair; Brandland, Carrell, Marr and McAuliffe.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senator Stevens, Ranking Minority Member.

Staff: Kevin Black (786-7747)

Background: Family preparation is training through courses, seminars, or counseling that prepares couples for marriage. Training often focuses on developing skills such as communication, handling conflict, solving problems, and making decisions. The goals of family preparation often include developing skills in the following areas: communication, friendship, commitment to the relationship, intimacy, and problem-solving. Instruction usually includes applying these skills to such issues as conflict, finances, role expectations, couple interaction patterns, expectations about children and parenting, decision-making, and religious or spiritual values and expectations.

Summary of Bill (Recommended Substitute): The Secretary of the Department of Health (DOH) is directed to establish a pilot program to provide merit checks of no more than \$100 to no more than 450 couples who complete a family preparation course. The program is permitted to utilize matching funds to increase the number of participants in the pilot program. The department must assure that administrative costs do not exceed 5 percent of the total allocation. The pilot program must begin no later than January 1, 2008, and continue for no more than five years in a county with a population between 720,000 and 1,000,000.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Under the pilot program, a man and a woman who intend to apply for a marriage license may, jointly or separately, complete a family preparation course of not less than four hours with a family preparation course provider registered with the clerk of the county.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTION COMMITTEE (Recommended Substitute): Adds a 5 percent cap on the amount which DOH may use for the cost of administering the program.

Appropriation: \$45,000.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This committee has traditionally been interested in preventive practices. There has been bi-partisan support of this concept. This pilot project focuses on providing couples with the tools that they need to prepare them for marriage. Divorce rates in Pierce County are higher than the average for the state. Divorce has a tremendous cost on society.

Studies show that the highest percent of divorces occur early in marriage. Studies further show that couples do not take advantage of family preparation to the extent that they can. Providing merit checks to young couples to encourage them to participate in counseling is an effective way in which to encourage them to obtain the tools to succeed in their marriage.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Kastama, prime sponsor; Marianne Busche, Private Practice Marriage Therapist; Art Hunt, Lighthouse Christian Center; Larry Kvamme, citizen; Jeff Kemp, Families Northwest; Sally Jo Sund, A.C.T. Counseling.