

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## SB 5395

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**As Passed House:**  
April 6, 2011

**Title:** An act relating to domestic violence fatality review panels.

**Brief Description:** Changing provisions involving domestic violence fatality review panels.

**Sponsors:** Senators Hargrove and Stevens.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Early Learning & Human Services: 3/22/11, 3/24/11 [DP].

**Floor Activity:**

Passed House: 4/6/11, 97-0.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Authorizes the Domestic Violence Fatality Review to convene statewide issue-specific fatality review panels in addition to regional domestic violence review panels.
- Requires that any issue-specific fatality review panel convened must include individuals with expertise in the subject-matter being examined.
- Requires an issue-specific review panel to make periodic reports to the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence for every fatality reviewed by the panel.
- Provides that the Domestic Violence Fatality Review may make periodic reports to the Legislature containing recommendations on policy changes and issues identified through the work of the regional fatality review panels; a biennial report is no longer required.
- Makes technical changes regarding distribution of reports to the Legislature.

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**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & HUMAN SERVICES**

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**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Roberts, Vice Chair; Walsh, Ranking Minority Member; Hope, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Dickerson, Goodman, Johnson, Orwall and Overstreet.

**Staff:** Linda Merelle (786-7092).

**Background:**

The Domestic Violence Fatality Review (DVFR) was formed in 1997, and began reviewing domestic violence fatality cases in 1998. In 2000 the Legislature established the fatality review process in statute. The Department of Social and Health Services contracts with the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence to coordinate the review of domestic violence fatalities. There are fatality review panels in 16 counties. The DVFR has reviewed 84 cases from 1998 through 2010. Oral and written communication and documents shared within or produced by a regional domestic violence fatality review panel are confidential and not subject to disclosure or discovery by a third party. The representatives of a regional domestic violence fatality review are immune from civil liability for any activity related to reviews of particular fatalities as a result of good faith actions within established parameters and protocols.

The primary goals of the DVFR are to promote communication and collaboration among agencies that investigate and intervene in cases involving domestic violence, identify patterns in domestic violence-related fatalities, and make recommendations regarding investigations, the intervention, and the prevention of domestic violence.

The DVFR issues a statewide report in December in even-numbered years. The DVFR has published six reports. The most recent was issued in December 2010. Pursuant to statute, the December 2010 report was required to contain recommendations regarding whether the domestic violence review process should be continued or terminated by the Legislature. The DVFR has recommended that the Legislature continue the statutory authority for the fatality review panels. In its 2010 report, it has also recommended that the Legislature amend the statutory authority to allow for both regional panels and ad hoc review panels which focus on a particular issue or population.

**Summary of Bill:**

In addition to the existing authority to convene regional domestic violence fatality review panels, the DVFR is authorized to convene statewide issue-specific review panels, gather information for use in those panels, and to provide training and technical assistance to the issue-specific panels. School teachers, guidance counselors, or personnel who work with student health services may be included in the regional review panels. Any statewide issue-specific panel convened must include individuals who have expertise in the subject-matter being examined. An issue-specific review panel must make periodic reports to the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, or other coordinating entity for every fatality reviewed by the panel.

The DVFR is no longer required to issue biennial reports, but may issue periodic reports containing its recommendations on policy changes that would improve program performance

and issues identified through the work of the regional fatality review panels. The DVFR is required to report to the appropriate legislative committees, rather than specific committees identified in statute.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) Communities now have the ability to come together in regional panels to address what is going on in their community. The allowance of ad hoc review panels will give the DVFR some flexibility to address specific issues.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Grace Huang and Jake Fawcett, Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.