

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 6279

As Reported by House Committee On: Judiciary

Title: An act relating to creating effective and timely access to magistrates for purposes of reviewing search warrant applications.

Brief Description: Creating effective and timely access to magistrates for purposes of reviewing search warrant applications.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Law & Justice (originally sponsored by Senators Kline, Padden, O'Ban, Pedersen and Tom).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Judiciary: 2/25/14, 2/26/14 [DPA].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill (As Amended by Committee)

- Provides that a district or municipal court judge may issue a warrant for any person or evidence located anywhere within the state if the warrant pertains to an offense alleged to have occurred in the judge's county.
- Permits application and issuance of warrants by telephone, electronic mail, or other reliable method.
- Modifies the means by which a person may subscribe to a certification or declaration to allow subscription by electronic means.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Jinkins, Chair; Hansen, Vice Chair; Rodne, Ranking Minority Member; Nealey, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Goodman, Haler, Kirby, Klippert, Muri, Orwall, Roberts, Shea and Walkinshaw.

Staff: Omeara Harrington (786-7136).

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.

Background:

Article I, section 7 of the Washington Constitution provides that "[n]o person shall be disturbed in his private affairs, or his home invaded, without authority of law." The privacy protection embodied in Article I, section 7 limits the government's authority to conduct searches and seizures. As a general rule, a search or seizure may be conducted only pursuant to a warrant that is based upon probable cause and issued by a detached and neutral magistrate.

Magistrates are judicial officers with the power to issue warrants. By statutory definition, any justice of the Washington Supreme Court, or judge of the court of appeals, superior court, district court, or municipal court is a magistrate. Magistrates of courts with statewide jurisdiction may issue a warrant to be executed anywhere in the state. The warrant issuing authority of a district or municipal court magistrate is limited to warrants for matters that fall within the district or municipal court's jurisdiction.

The requirements and procedures for issuance of warrants are outlined in court rules. These rules provide that a warrant may be issued to search for and seize: (1) evidence of a crime; (2) contraband, the fruits of crime, or things otherwise criminally possessed; (3) weapons or other things by means of which a crime has been committed or reasonably appears about to be committed; or (4) a person for whose arrest there is probable cause, or who is unlawfully restrained. A search warrant may be issued only if the court determines there is probable cause for the issuance of a warrant. When the court is satisfied that probable cause exists, the court must issue a warrant identifying the property or person and naming or describing the person, place, or thing to be searched. The court may issue the warrant directly or may direct an authorized individual to affix the court's signature to the warrant. Evidence establishing probable cause must be recorded or otherwise preserved and made part of the court record.

An application for a warrant must be supported by a statement establishing the grounds upon which the warrant is based. This statement may be in the form of an affidavit, sworn testimony (which may be delivered telephonically and electronically recorded), or through a certification or declaration. Affidavits and sworn testimony are statements made under oath that place the applicant, who is a police officer or prosecutor, under penalty of perjury when supplying the information that serves as the basis of a warrant. In order for an unsworn certification or declaration to support a warrant application, it must meet the general statutory requirements that give unsworn statements the force and effect of sworn statements. These requirements are that the certification or declaration is in the form of a writing that recites that the statement is certified or declared to be true under penalty of perjury, and is subscribed to by signature.

Summary of Amended Bill:

The scope of local magistrates' power to issue warrants to be executed in another jurisdiction is outlined. A district or municipal court judge may issue a warrant for any person or evidence located anywhere within the state if the warrant pertains to an offense alleged to have occurred within the district or municipal court judge's county.

Statutory language is adopted that tracks the court rule descriptions of property and persons for which a warrant may be issued. Additional language is included to permit application and issuance of a warrant by electronic or other alternative means. A warrant may be applied for by telephone, electronic mail (e-mail), or other reliable method. Additionally, the magistrate may use telephone, e-mail, or other reliable method to communicate permission to another person to affix the magistrate's signature to the warrant. The evidence supporting the finding of probable cause and a record of the magistrate's permission to issue the warrant must be preserved and filed according to the applicable court rules.

The means are expanded by which a certification or declaration may be subscribed to in order to place the person executing the document under penalty of perjury. In addition to subscription by signature, a person may subscribe to an unsworn statement by digital signature or electronic signature. If the person is an attorney, he or she may subscribe electronically in the manner described in the court rule governing electronic filing. If the person is a law enforcement officer, the subscription requirement is satisfied by affixing or logically associating the person's full name, department or agency, and badge or personnel number to an electronically submitted document from an electronic device that is owned, issued, or maintained by a criminal justice agency.

Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill:

The language authorizing district and municipal court judges to issue warrants for persons or evidence located anywhere within the county in which the court is located or an adjoining county is removed. Instead, a district or municipal court judge in the county in which the offense is alleged to have occurred may issue a warrant for any person or evidence located anywhere within the state.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This bill expands judicial resources, saves money, and saves time, and it will benefit rural counties. The procedures required for obtaining a warrant do not change; this will simply streamline the process. The bill allows courts of limited jurisdiction to issue warrants in other counties. This can be used in situations in which a blood draw is required in a driving under the influence case and the hospital conducting the blood draw is in another county. The amendment is a beneficial change and is worked out with the Senate.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Kline, prime sponsor; Tom McBride, Washington Association of Prosecuting Attorneys; Jim Nagle; and Don Pierce, Washington Sheriffs and Police Chiefs Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.