

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6281

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Natural Resources & Parks, January 30, 2014

Title: An act relating to ensuring an effective hunter education program.

Brief Description: Ensuring an effective hunter education program.

Sponsors: Senators Roach, Pedersen, Benton and Conway.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources & Parks: 1/28/14, 1/30/14 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6281 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Pearson, Chair; Liias, Ranking Member; Dansel, Hargrove, Hewitt, Kline and Parlette.

Staff: Richard Rodger (786-7401)

Background: The Washington hunter education program, which is approved by the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW), consists of at least ten hours of instruction in safety, conservation, sportsmanship, and firearm handling. Average classes involve four to six sessions and require the student to pass a written test and, other than students who are in the military, demonstrate firearms handling skills.

The DFW Hunter Education Instructor Policy Manual (manual) provides that instructors are strongly encouraged to include live firing in all courses, but the student's participation is not mandatory. A student who opts out of the live-fire activity must still complete all associated steps using inert ammunition. A student may not be failed for opting out of the live-fire activity.

The manual prohibits students from bringing a personal firearm to any portion of a hunter education course. Any student who uses a personal firearm during a course will fail the course and be asked to leave immediately.

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.

Summary of Bill (Recommended Substitute): A hunter education instructor may, at the instructor's discretion, require their students to participate in live-fire training. DFW will provide notice of the particular class live-fire requirement when publishing the hunter education class schedules. Students may choose a class with or without the live-fire training.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS COMMITTEE (Recommended Substitute): Allows an instructor to require live-fire training of all students taking a particular class, instead of just those under age 18. DFW will provide notice of which classes have the live-fire requirement, allowing the students to choose a class with their preference. Removes the exception for proof of prior live-fire instruction.

Eliminates the provision that allowed a student to bring a personal firearm to class.

Appropriation: None.

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 On Original Bill: PRO: This bill promotes safety in hunter education and prevents the attrition of instructors and participants. The bill allows considerable choice between instructors as to whether they would require live-fire practice for use in their class. There is no cost associated with the bill.

CON: This bill would place too much liability on the instructor with regard to allowing students to bring in their own firearms.

OTHER: There is support for the concepts and intent of the bill. However, there is still work that needs to be done on the amendment. The proposed statute changes are already in current policy for the instructors, as they are strongly encouraged to use live-fire training. There are issues surrounding facilities required for live-fire exercises, as well as for people with disabilities who may require specialized equipment, and for felons who are legally forbidden from handling firearms. Students who opt out of live-fire demonstrations must still complete the other requirements of the course. The allowance of personal firearms to be utilized in the course is of great concern.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Roach, prime sponsor.

CON: Mike Iyall, Hunter Education Instructor.

OTHER: David Whipple, DFW, Hunter Education Division Manager; Bob Cromwell, Hunter Education Instructor.