

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1720

As Passed House:
March 10, 2015

Title: An act relating to healthy housing.

Brief Description: Concerning healthy housing.

Sponsors: Representatives Robinson, Peterson, Stanford, Riccelli, Gregerson, Senn, Appleton, Ortiz-Self, Tarleton, Jinkins and Santos.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Community Development, Housing & Tribal Affairs: 2/5/15, 2/10/15 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/10/15, 74-23.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Department of Commerce to include projects that improve health and safety in the prioritization of funds and develop policies supporting the health and safety of residents under the Low-Income Residential Weatherization Program.
- Authorizes healthy housing improvements for homes undergoing weatherization and defines "healthy housing improvements."

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, HOUSING & TRIBAL AFFAIRS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Appleton, Chair; Robinson, Vice Chair; Johnson, Ranking Minority Member; Zeiger, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Hawkins, Sawyer and Van De Wege.

Staff: Kirsten Lee (786-7133).

Background:

Low-Income Residential Weatherization Program.

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.

In 1987 the Legislature established the Low-Income Residential Weatherization Program (Program). This voluntary Program, administered by the Department of Commerce (Commerce), seeks to achieve monetary and energy savings for low-income households and other energy consumers by directing public and private weatherization resources from sponsoring entities or other sources to low-income households. Fund sources include the Weatherization Assistance Program within the United States Department of Energy, the Bonneville Power Administration, and the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program within the United States Health and Human Services Department. Commerce also receives state funds, which are matched by utility companies that sell gas and electric heat. Commerce defines "low-income," but the amount may not exceed 80 percent of median household income, adjusted for household size, for the county in which the dwelling unit to be weatherized is located.

Weatherization services provided under the Program include energy and resource conservation, energy efficiency improvements, repairs, indoor quality improvements, health and safety improvements, and client education. Commerce solicits proposals for low-income weatherization programs from potential sponsors and allocates funding.

United States Department of Energy Weatherization Assistance Program/Weatherization Plus Health Initiative.

The United States Department of Energy's (US DOE) Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) was created in 1976 to assist low-income families who lacked resources to invest in energy efficiency. The WAP also plays a role in ensuring the health and safety of low-income homes. The US DOE funded Weatherization Plus Health Initiative connects the WAP network with providers of healthy homes services. Healthy homes services include lead hazard control, remediation of asthma triggers (including moisture, mold, and pests), reduction in exposure to radon and other toxic chemicals, and prevention of injuries caused by old or dilapidated housing.

Summary of Bill:

Sponsors submitting proposals under the Program may propose to use grant awards and matching funds to make healthy housing improvements to homes undergoing weatherization. Projects that improve the health and safety of residents are added to the types of projects that receive prioritized funding from the Program. Commerce must also develop policies that improve the health and safety of residents in homes and building requiring improvements.

Healthy housing is defined as increasing the health and safety of a home by integrating energy efficiency activities and indoor environmental measures, consistent with the Weatherization Plus Health Initiative of the US DOE and the healthy housing principles adopted by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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) Washington Community Action Partnership is in support of this bill. Low-income weatherization programs create healthy and safe living environments and preserves existing affordable housing and stabilizes neighborhoods. Substandard housing is one of the biggest challenges facing low-income individuals in Washington.

The Weatherization Plus Health initiative was initially developed in 2003 with the Opportunity Council in Bellingham, Washington. The Opportunity Council received funding from Housing and Urban Development, a one-time grant. The grant was leveraged with the Program. The Opportunity Council already worked with affected residents and had the resources to address the issues seen in homes, such as mold and moisture problems. The Opportunity Council developed a comprehensive and targeted approach to address the weatherization issues in homes.

In 2011 the Opportunity Council worked with the US DOE, developed the Weatherization Plus Health initiative, based on the local program in Bellingham. The initiative was a success nationwide, but no funding was available to support the initiative.

The Opportunity Council has supported the local program with private funding since 2003 and has been able to collect data. Preliminary results show that the Weatherization Plus Health initiative has helped reduce the use of Medicaid amongst participating families. Children have had fewer incidents of using inhalers, sleep better, and are not visiting the emergency rooms any longer. About 20 percent of the homes the Opportunity Council works with receive Weatherization Plus Health Initiative services.

The Program melds well with the Weatherization Plus Health initiative. The Opportunity Council provides access to the Weatherization Plus Health initiative through other programs. They provide education and services. The services are very targeted to the needs of the residents and average approximately \$2,500 per house in addition to any weatherization expenses.

Incorporating the Weatherization Plus Health initiative into the Program would allow all agencies across the state to deliver Weatherization Plus Health services within existing resources.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Robinson, prime sponsor; and Dave Finet, Opportunity Council.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.