

HOUSE BILL REPORT

2SSB 5404

As Reported by House Committee On:
Early Learning & Human Services

Title: An act relating to homeless youth prevention and protection.

Brief Description: Concerning homeless youth prevention and protection.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators O'Ban, Darneille, Frockt, Miloscia, Kohl-Welles, McAuliffe, Chase, Pedersen and Conway; by request of Governor Inslee).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Early Learning & Human Services: 3/18/15, 3/26/15 [DP].

Brief Summary of Second Substitute Bill

- Creates an Office of Homeless Youth Prevention and Protection Programs (Office) within the Department of Commerce.
- Requires the Office to lead efforts to coordinate a spectrum of funding, policy, and practice efforts related to homeless youth with a focus on five stated service priorities: (1) stable housing; (2) family reconciliation; (3) education and employment; (4) permanent connections; and (5) social and emotional well-being.
- Authorizes the Office to provide the management and oversight of HOPE Centers, Crisis Residential Centers, street youth services, and Independent Youth Housing Programs.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & HUMAN SERVICES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Walkinshaw, Vice Chair; Walsh, Ranking Minority Member; Kilduff, Ortiz-Self, Sawyer and Senn.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Scott, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Dent and McCaslin.

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.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Hawkins.

Staff: Ashley Paintner (786-7120).

Background:

Programs for Street and Homeless Youth.

The Children's Administration of the Department of Social and Health Services administers a number of programs regarding the care of street and homeless youth, such as HOPE Centers and Crisis Residential Services (CRCs).

HOPE Centers. In 1999 the Washington Legislature passed the HOPE Act, which created HOPE Centers. HOPE Centers provide temporary residential placements for street youth under the age of 18. Youth may self-refer to a HOPE Center for services and entering a center is voluntary. While residing in a HOPE Center, youth undergo a comprehensive assessment in order to develop the best plan for the youth. The assessment includes gathering information on the youth's legal status, and conducting a physical examination, a mental health and chemical abuse evaluation, and an educational evaluation of their basic skills, along with any learning disabilities or special needs. The plan will focus on finding a permanent and stable home for the youth.

Crisis Residential Centers. Crisis Residential Centers (CRCs) are short-term, semi-secure facilities for runaway youth and adolescents in conflict with their families. Youth cannot remain in a CRC more than 15 consecutive days. Counselors at a CRC work with the family to resolve the immediate conflict and develop better ways of dealing with the conflict in the future. The stated goal of CRCs is to reunite the family and youth whenever possible. In 1995 Washington state implemented policies for at-risk youth intended to protect children and help families reconcile. The "Becca Bill" established Secure Crisis Residential Centers (SCRCs) and authorized law enforcement to pick up runaway youth or youth found in dangerous circumstances and place them in a SCRC.

Other Youth Housing Programs.

Independent Youth Housing Program. The Department of Commerce (COM) operates the Independent Youth Housing Program (IHYP), which provides rental assistance and case management for eligible youth who have aged out of the state foster care system. These funds are intended to assist in meeting the state goal of ensuring that all such youth avoid experiencing homelessness by having access to decent, appropriate, and affordable homes in a healthy and safe environment.

Home Security Fund.

Both the state and county homeless housing programs receive funding through a local homeless housing and assistance surcharge. The surcharge is \$40 per recorded document and applies to certain documents relating to real property specified in statute. The state's share is deposited into the Home Security Fund. The COM uses these funds for a number of homeless housing programs, with at least 45 percent of the state's share set aside for the use of private rental housing payments.

Homeless Families Services Fund.

The Homeless Families Services Fund is in the custody of the State Treasurer and the COM may expend monies from the fund to provide state matched funds for housing-supportive services for homeless families.

Summary of Bill:

The Office of Homeless Youth Prevention and Protection Programs (Office) is created within the COM and must be operational no later than January 1, 2016. The Office is responsible for leading efforts to coordinate a spectrum of funding, policy, and practice efforts related to homeless youth with a stated goal of preventing state systems from discharging youth and young adults into homelessness. There are five stated priority service areas: (1) stable housing; (2) family reconciliation; (3) education and employment; (4) permanent connections; and (5) social and emotional well-being. The Office shall address practice gaps within the state system among these five priority service areas.

The goals of the Office are to measurably decrease the number of homeless youth and young adults by identifying programs that address the initial causes of homelessness and measurably increase permanency rates among homeless youth by decreasing the length and occurrences of youth homelessness caused by a youth's separation from family or a legal guardian. Regular consultation must occur between the Office and an advisory committee comprised of advocates, legislators, parent advocates, law enforcement, service providers, and other stakeholders knowledgeable in the provision of services to homeless youth and young adults.

The Office is authorized to provide the management and oversight of HOPE Centers, CRCs, street youth services, and IYHPs. Crisis Residential Centers must record client information into a homeless management information system specified by the COM. By December 1, 2016, the Office must submit a report to the Governor and to the Legislature to inform recommendations for funding, policy, and best practices in the five priority service areas. Additionally, the Office must establish a statewide training program on homeless youth for criminal justice personnel.

The Joint Legislative Audit Review Committee (JLARC) is required to conduct a review and submit a report on state-funded programs that serve unaccompanied homeless youth under the age of 18, including dependent youth. The stated purpose of the JLARC review is to determine what performance measures and statutory reporting requirements exist and whether there is reliable data on ages of youth served, length of stay, and effectiveness of program exit and reentry.

The Homeless Families Services Fund is renamed the Washington Youth and Families Fund.

Definitions are provided for the following: child, juvenile, youth, and minor; homeless; runaway; street youth; unaccompanied; young adult; administrator; child in need of services petition; crisis residential center; HOPE center; secure facility; semi-secure facility; staff secure facility; and unaccompanied homeless student.

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) Compared to the version passed out of this committee, the Senate version does draw some distinctions between homeless youth who are under age 18 compared to those over age 18. Youth are defined as those under age 18 and young adults are defined as persons age 18 or over. The reason for this change was to ensure the program implementation piece focused on the separate age groups while system planning was still able to focus on homeless youth and young adults holistically. The Senate bill also adds family reconciliation as an additional policy area the Office should focus on. The Governor's office would support an amendment to roll the requirements currently listed for the JLARC review into the core mission of the Office. Another issue that has come up during testimony is around the multiple definitions for homeless youth. One concern that was raised was whether kids who are living in a doubled-up situation would be considered homeless. The answer under the McKinney-Vento Act is yes, however, the determination is made on a case-by-case basis. Homeless liaisons would communicate with the youth and ask whether they consider themselves homeless or not. Additionally, in regards to mobile-homes being included under the McKinney-Vento definition, the COM can speak more to the specificity that exists around mobile-homes being included under the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness. It is also important to point out that the COM has been a proponent of using manufactured housing as one way to address affordable housing in Washington state.

The Homeless Youth Prevention and Protection Act is key factor in the battle against youth homelessness. The outcomes for young people who experience homelessness are devastating. They are devastating for both the young person and for the community. Homeless youth who are forced to live on the streets have a higher likelihood of being sexually exploited, experiencing violence, and of using substances that are harmful to their mind and body. The bill addresses the lack of resources that exist for homeless youth in their home communities and it strives to make services available in the communities youth live in. Youth and young adults in Washington should not have to face homelessness alone and should have access to the services they need, such as mental health services, in the community they live in. Furthermore, providing services in the communities should increase the likelihood that youth will be able to reunify with their families when safe and appropriate. Youth had a voice in drafting this Act, which will help ensure the bill addresses the issues homeless youth actually face. Additionally, the Act recognizes that safe shelter is just the first step for homeless youth and it necessary to include education and other services. This bill will bring the state one step closer to ending youth homelessness in Washington.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Andi Smith, Office of the Governor; and Shallamar Campbell, Clayton Hefley, and Erin Shea McCann, Mockingbird Society.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.