

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6100

As of February 16, 2016

Title: An act relating to establishing an economic gardening pilot program.

Brief Description: Establishing an economic gardening pilot program.

Sponsors: Senators Chase, Brown, Angel, Hatfield, Ericksen and McCoy.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Trade & Economic Development: 1/20/16.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRADE & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Staff: Jeff Olsen (786-7428)

Background: Economic gardening programs provide strategic technical assistance to grow currently existing small- to medium-sized businesses. Examples of strategic economic gardening services include market research, website search engine optimization, developing social media strategies, and using geographic information systems. Economic gardening began in Littleton, Colorado in 1987 after the community's largest employer laid off several thousand workers. Rather than recruit new companies to the area, the community encouraged the growth of companies in the community. Several states operate economic gardening programs including Colorado, Michigan, Florida, and Wyoming. Recently, the Tri-City Regional Chamber in Washington entered into an economic gardening pilot program. The National Center for Economic Gardening, part of the Michigan-based Edward Lowe Foundation, partners with local organizations to assist with the pilot program.

The Small Business Development Center is a network of business advisors that operate from Washington State University, Western Washington University, certain community and technical colleges, and economic development agencies around the state.

Summary of Bill: An economic gardening pilot program is established in the Department of Commerce to provide strategic business assistance services to second-stage companies. Second-stage companies must employ at least six but no more than 99 persons and have annual gross revenue between \$500,000 and \$50 million. Strategic economic gardening assistance includes market research, business modeling, identifying qualified sales leads, and assisting with innovation strategies.

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.

The Department of Commerce must work with the state director of the Small Business Development Center to implement the pilot project. The state director must certify at least eight staff members in economic gardening by a nationally certified entity. The state director must publish criteria for selecting up to 20 companies to participate in the project. Companies seeking to participate in the pilot program must pay a one-time fee of \$750 that must be deposited in the newly created Economic Gardening Pilot Project fund to be used for administering the pilot project. Before November 1, 2016, and annually through November 1, 2018, the state director must submit a report to the economic development committees of the Legislature regarding the services provided, jobs created, and increased sales and services generated as a result of the pilot project.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The Senate Trade and Economic Development Committee has heard testimony today with many examples of the success of economic gardening.

OTHER: The Department of Commerce is neutral on the bill but very excited about the concept of economic gardening. The Department is closely following the economic gardening pilot project in the Tri-Cities to learn from their experiences. The Department is considering a pilot economic gardening program using associate development organizations and chambers of commerce as a service delivery model, focusing on under-served populations and businesses impacted by military downsizing.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Chase, prime sponsor.

OTHER: Chris Green, Dept. of Commerce.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.