

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1759

As Reported by House Committee On: Public Safety

Title: An act relating to procedures for communicating with crime victims and survivors of crime victims.

Brief Description: Addressing procedures for communicating with crime victims and survivors of crime victims.

Sponsors: Representatives Ortiz-Self, Orwall, Gregerson and Jinkins.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Public Safety: 2/6/17, 2/9/17 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires the Office of Crime Victims Advocacy to coordinate a work group to examine local practices for family notification in homicide cases and to make recommendations regarding provision of victim services information.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Goodman, Chair; Pellicciotti, Vice Chair; Klippert, Ranking Minority Member; Hayes, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Appleton, Chapman, Griffey, Holy, Pettigrew and Van Werven.

Staff: Omeara Harrington (786-7136).

Background:

The Office of Crime Victims Advocacy (OCVA) is a program of the Department of Commerce. The OCVA assists communities in planning and implementing services for crime victims, advocates on behalf of crime victims in obtaining needed services and resources, and advises the state and local governments on practices, policies, and priorities that impact

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crime victims. In addition, the OCVA administers grant programs for services to victims of crime and crime prevention activities.

The OCVA administers the Crime Victim Service Center program, which provides services to victims of crime and survivors of homicide victims. Advocates at crime victim service centers provide crisis intervention, information and referral services, and advocacy related to medical and legal needs. Some centers additionally provide support groups and mental-health related services.

A 24-hour Washington State Crime Victims Service Center Hotline provides crisis intervention and referral to local crime victim service centers. In addition, the Department of Commerce maintains a direct services line for referral to local crime victim services.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The Department of Commerce, through the OCVA, must convene and coordinate a work group to examine the practices around the state regarding notification of family members when a person has died from a suspected homicide or other criminal means, and to develop recommendations for providing crime victims and survivors of homicide victims with information about crime victim services. The work group must meet at least twice, in person, for a minimum of eight hours.

The work group's membership must include: the OCVA; law enforcement; coroners and medical examiners; prosecutors; chaplain services; victim support services; and a private citizen who has been directly impacted by the homicide of a family member. Persons who work directly with local victim notification processes in Whatcom, Snohomish, King, Franklin, Yakima, and Grant counties must be represented among the work group membership.

The work group must gather information regarding the current processes around the state for family notification of a homicide or death by other criminal means, identify gaps in current local processes for family notification, and generate best practices for family notification. Best practices may include identification of:

- who is responsible in a local jurisdiction for providing notification;
- appropriate timelines for notification;
- alternative processes when a family member is suspected of causing the death;
- overcoming language barriers in the notification process;
- collaboration between law enforcement and victim services organizations; and
- other best practices identified by the work group.

The work group must additionally develop recommendations for ways in which law enforcement officers responding to the scene of a crime may provide crime victims and survivors of homicide victims with information about crime victim services.

A report summarizing the information collected by the work group and the work group's recommendations is due to the Governor and the appropriate committees of the Legislature by December 1, 2017.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The requirement for responding law enforcement officers to provide victims and survivors of victims with information about crime victim services is removed. Instead, the work group created in the bill must develop recommendations for ways in which responding officers may provide crime victims and survivors of homicide victims with information about crime victim services.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute 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 is about making sure there is uniformity when someone has had a loss. It calls for an assessment of best practices around notification, and expands a current requirement of law enforcement to notify victims of a hotline number when they encounter a victim of domestic violence or sexual abuse. The bill would add a third number to that piece of paper for the hotline for victim assistance. Washington has a network of advocates to help victims get the services they need.

This bill would fill a void that occurs when a loved one is taken away by a criminal act. In one instance a person's spouse was killed outside of her work in the course of a robbery. This person was not notified of the death until hours later after a friend of his sister reached out through social media. Efforts to get information from law enforcement were not successful. There was no notification about victim support services, and it was weeks before the family was referred for behavioral health services by the family pediatrician. This bill will allow for proper communication to connect families to services.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Ortiz-Self, prime sponsor; and Brad Tower, Washington Coalition of Crime Victims Advocates.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.