
Public Safety Committee

HB 2271

Brief Description: Concerning the processes for reviewing sexually violent predators committed under chapter 71.09 RCW.

Sponsors: Representatives Muri and Kilduff; by request of Attorney General.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Specifies certain review standards for the court to evaluate whether to order evidentiary trials for unconditional or conditional release of persons committed as sexually violent predators.

Hearing Date: 1/8/18

Staff: Kelly Leonard (786-7147).

Background:

Sexually Violent Predators. A sexually violent predator (SVP) is a person who has been convicted of, found not guilty by reason of insanity of, or found to be incompetent to stand trial for a crime of sexual violence and who suffers from a mental abnormality or personality disorder that makes the person likely to engage in predatory acts of sexual violence if not confined in a secure facility.

A prosecutor may petition for indefinite civil commitment of a SVP when he or she is about to be released from a state correctional facility, among other circumstances. The filing of such a petition triggers a probable cause determination followed by a full evidentiary trial. At the trial, the burden is on the state to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the person is a SVP. If the person requests a 12-person jury, the jury must be unanimous. If the person is found to be a SVP, he or she is committed to the custody of the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) for control, care, and treatment at the Special Commitment Center on McNeil Island.

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.

Annual Examinations and Review Proceedings. On an annual basis, the DSHS must conduct an examination of a committed person's mental condition to determine whether the person continues to meet the definition of a SVP and whether conditional release to a less restrictive alternative (LRA) is in the person's best interest and conditions can be imposed to adequately protect the community. The DSHS may authorize the person to petition the court for a full trial to consider either unconditional release into the community or conditional release to a LRA.

A committed person may also petition the court for unconditional or conditional release without the approval of the DSHS. The DSHS must send annual written notice of the right to petition the court, along with a waiver of rights. If the committed person does not waive the right, the court must set a show cause hearing to determine if probable cause exists to warrant a trial.

At the show cause hearing, the state bears the burden to present prima facie evidence that the committed person continues to meet the definition of a SVP and that conditional release to a LRA would be inappropriate. The court must order an evidentiary hearing if the state fails to meet its burdens, or, alternatively, if the committed person establishes probable cause to believe his or her condition has so changed that he or she no longer meets the definition of a SVP, warranting unconditional release, or that conditional release to a LRA would be appropriate. However, a trial may not be ordered unless there is current evidence from a licensed professional that: (a) the committed person has undergone a permanent physiological change, such as paralysis, stroke, or dementia, which renders him or her unable to commit a sexually violent act; or (b) treatment has brought about a positive change in mental condition. Further, when a person seeks conditional release to an LRA, the court may not find probable cause unless the committed person proposes a LRA placement plan meeting current statutory requirements.

In Re. Det. of Marcum. In August of 2017, the Washington Supreme Court issued *In re Det. of Marcum*, 189 Wn.2d 1, 2017, determining that the state must meet both burdens regardless of the type of release sought by the committed person, including that the committed person continues to meet the definition of a SVP and that conditional release to a LRA would be inappropriate. If the state fails to make this two-pronged showing, the court must order a trial on the issue of unconditional release, conditional release, or both.

Summary of Bill:

Intent. An intent section is included specifying the Legislature's intent to overturn *In Re. Det. of Marcum*. The intent of the statute has been that there are two independent issues at a post-commitment show cause hearing: whether the individual continues to meet statutory criteria; and if so, whether conditional release to a LRA is appropriate. Lack of proof of one issue does not affect the finding on the other issue. The *Marcum* holding is not only a mistaken interpretation, but it will lead to absurd results, where SVPs could petition and receive a trial for unconditional release when they clearly do not qualify for it.

Show Cause Hearing. If the state produces prima facie evidence that the committed person continues to be a SVP, then the state's burden under the statute is met, and an unconditional release trial may not be ordered unless the committed person:

- produces evidence demonstrating probable cause exists to believe his condition has so changed that he or she no longer meets the definition of a SVP or that release to a LRA

would be in the person's best interest and conditions would adequately protect the community; and

- produces evidence demonstrating that the committed person has undergone a permanent physiological change, such as paralysis, stroke, or dementia, which renders him or her unable to commit a sexually violent act; or treatment has brought about a positive change in mental condition.

If the state produces prima facie evidence that a LRA is not appropriate for the committed person, then the state's burden under the statute is met, and a conditional release trial may not be ordered unless the committed person:

- produces evidence demonstrating probable cause exists to believe his condition has so changed that he or she no longer meets the definition of a SVP or that release to a LRA would be in the person's best interest and conditions would adequately protect the community;
- produces evidence demonstrating that the committed person has undergone a permanent physiological change, such as paralysis, stroke, or dementia, which renders him or her unable to commit a sexually violent act; or treatment has brought about a positive change in mental condition; and
- presents a proposed LRA placement plan meeting current statutory requirements.

Application. The bill is curative and remedial, and it applies retroactively and prospectively to all petitions.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 3, 2018.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.