

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5261

As of January 25, 2019

Title: An act relating to creating a pilot program for certain cities to hire homeless persons for local beautification projects.

Brief Description: Creating a pilot program for certain cities to hire homeless persons for local beautification projects.

Sponsors: Senators Zeiger, Kuderer, Das, Warnick, Nguyen and Palumbo.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Housing Stability & Affordability: 1/23/19.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Department of Commerce to establish a three-year pilot program for three select cities to provide job opportunities to and hire homeless persons for purposes of local beautification projects.
- Requires those persons hired under the program to be paid at least the local minimum wage and be connected with organizations that provide wraparound housing services.
- Requires those selected cities to report to the Legislature on the number of persons hired during the pilot program, the number of persons connected with wraparound housing services, strategies for hiring homeless persons for other projects, and legislative recommendations.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING STABILITY & AFFORDABILITY

Staff: Brandon Popovac (786-7465)

Background: Local Programs Hiring Homeless Persons. Local programs that hire homeless persons for local projects have been implemented across the nation in the last few years. Cities such as Albuquerque, Boise, Denver, Dallas, Omaha, San Diego, and Anaheim have undertaken such programs, with hired persons engaging in job activities such as pulling weeds in parks, laying sod, picking up trash, and tidying up grounds at local dumps.

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.

Similarly, in Washington State, Seattle Conservation Corps employs homeless persons with paid apprenticeships in construction, such as bricklaying, carpentry, and plumbing, which can lead to union jobs with higher wages and benefits.

Homeless Assistance. The Department of Commerce (Commerce) administers several state and federal fund sources that support homeless programs statewide, including homelessness assistance and prevention.

Summary of Bill: Commerce must establish a three-year pilot program for three select cities to provide job opportunities to and hire homeless persons for local beautification projects during the summer months, if possible. Two of the selected cities must be located on the west side of the Cascade Mountains, and one must be located on the east side of the Cascade Mountains.

Any persons hired under the program must be paid at least the local minimum wage and be connected with organizations that provide wraparound housing services; they are not considered state employees and are exempt from state civil service, retirement, and leave provisions. Such persons are also excluded from unemployment compensation coverage, and Commerce must advise the selected cities of this exclusion.

Program project supervisors must be city employees.

The selected cities under the program must provide a report to the Legislature after its expiration on the number of homeless persons hired, the number of persons connected with wraparound housing services, strategies for hiring persons experiencing homelessness for other local projects, and any legislative recommendations.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Among the challenges facing our communities all across the state are people experiencing homelessness and the need for work opportunities for homeless adults. People experiencing homelessness face barriers in becoming employed, including barriers to go in for a job interview. Sometimes it is difficult to find a place to shower or to get a fresh set of clothes. Many homeless adults have a criminal record that is also a barrier to employment. While the state has created the Washington Conservation Corps, providing an opportunity for young people as well as veterans to get out into communities and do conservation work, nothing has been done specifically for the homeless adult population. The bill follows other examples of local jobs programs for homeless adults in Washington State and across the country, like Seattle Jobs Connect which is a partnership of the city of Seattle, downtown Seattle Association, the millionaire club, and other nonprofit organizations teaming together to create job opportunities. A homeless employment program

in Albuquerque, New Mexico has been heralded for its program. We need to do more of these kinds of programs which would be welcomed by many cities across the state.

The homelessness epidemic is having negative impact on families and people with businesses, without a common ground of agreement between both sides surrounding this issue. Examples from history like the Civilian Conservation Corps during the 1930s and 40s helped individuals work for pay until they were able to attain work in the private sector and often have very successful careers. The bill will likely not solve the homelessness problem in its entirety but may very well be the hand necessary to help people break the cycle of poverty through a life of self-discipline and personal hard work.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Hans Zeiger, Prime Sponsor; Dean Johnson, citizen.

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