

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5261

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As Reported by Senate Committee On:  
Housing Stability & Affordability, January 28, 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, 1/28/19 [DPS-WM].

### Brief Summary of First Substitute Bill

- Requires the Department of Commerce (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 the selected cities to have preexisting programming in place, a higher than average rate of unsheltered homeless persons, and the ability to provide a local match to state funds up to \$250,000.
- 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 the selected cities to report to Commerce on the number of persons hired during the pilot program, and the number of persons connected with wraparound housing services.
- Requires Commerce to report to the Legislature on the statistics supplied by the cities along with strategies for hiring homeless persons for other projects, and any legislative recommendations.

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## SENATE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING STABILITY & AFFORDABILITY

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*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.*

**Majority Report:** That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5261 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Kuderer, Chair; Das, Vice Chair; Zeiger, Ranking Member; Darneille, Fortunato, Saldaña and Warnick.

**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.

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 (First Substitute):** 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. The selected cities must have preexisting programming in place to support the pilot project, a higher than average rate of unsheltered homeless persons compared to sheltered persons, and the ability to provide a local match to state funds up to \$250,000.

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, but are eligible to receive sick leave and unemployment insurance compensation. Program project supervisors must be city employees.

The selected cities under the program must provide a report to Commerce by December 1, 2022, on the number of homeless persons hired and the number of persons connected with wraparound housing services. By July 1, 2023, Commerce must report to the Legislature on statistics provided by the cities, along with strategies for hiring persons experiencing homelessness for other local projects, and any legislative recommendations.

Language explicitly states the pilot program is not intended to preclude or curtail collective bargaining rights between a labor union and a public employer.

**EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY HOUSING STABILITY & AFFORDABILITY COMMITTEE (First Substitute):**

- Requires selected cities to have preexisting programming in place to support the pilot project, a higher than average rate of unsheltered homeless persons compared to sheltered persons, and the ability to provide a local match to state funds up to \$250,000.
- Reassigns reporting requirements to Commerce rather than to the cities with necessary adjustments made to reporting deadlines.
- Removes the exemption that any hired persons under the program are not eligible for sick leave and unemployment insurance compensation.
- Makes explicit that the program is not intended to preclude or curtail collective bargaining rights between a labor union and a public employer.

**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 on Original Bill:** *The committee recommended a different version of the bill than what was heard.* 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.