

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6179

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
State Government, Tribal Relations & Elections, January 31, 2020
Ways & Means, February 11, 2020

Title: An act relating to the Washington search and rescue grant program.

Brief Description: Concerning the Washington search and rescue grant program.

Sponsors: Senators Takko, Schoesler, Hunt and Wagoner.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: State Government, Tribal Relations & Elections: 1/24/20, 1/31/20 [DP-WM].
Ways & Means: 2/10/20, 2/11/20 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Creates a new, appropriated Search and Rescue Account in the custody of the Washington State Treasurer.
- Establishes a Search and Rescue Grant Program to be administered by the Military Department, subject to funds appropriated for this specific purpose.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT, TRIBAL RELATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Hunt, Chair; Kuderer, Vice Chair; Zeiger, Ranking Member; Muzzall, Assistant Ranking Member; Hasegawa and Takko.

Staff: Melissa Van Gorkom (786-7491)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Rolfes, Chair; Frockt, Vice Chair, Operating, Capital Lead; Mullet, Capital Budget Cabinet; Braun, Ranking Member; Brown, Assistant Ranking Member,

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Operating; Honeyford, Assistant Ranking Member, Capital; Becker, Billig, Carlyle, Conway, Darneille, Dhingra, Hasegawa, Hunt, Keiser, Liias, Muzzall, Pedersen, Rivers, Schoesler, Van De Wege, Wagoner, Warnick and Wilson, L..

Staff: Jed Herman (786-7346)

Background: Emergency Worker Program. The emergency worker program, which includes search and rescue activities, is predominately volunteer-oriented and often facilitated by nonprofit organizations in Washington State. The local director of emergency management works in a coordinating capacity directly supporting all search and rescue activities in that political subdivision and in registering emergency search and rescue workers. The State Coordinator of Search and Rescue Operations for the Military Department (Department) coordinates state resources, services and facilities requested by political subdivisions in support of search and rescue operations.

The chief law enforcement officer of each political subdivision is responsible for local search and rescue activities and must notify the Department as soon as practical of all missions or other emergency activities under their jurisdiction and request the assignment of a mission number. Search and rescue missions authorized by issuance of a Department mission number may be eligible for liability, medical, and personal property coverage as well as reimbursement for some incidental expenses while deployed on state-approved incidents and training events.

Emergency Management Council. The Emergency Management Council (Council) advises the Governor and the adjutant general on all matters pertaining to state and local emergency management. The Council must prepare an annual assessment of statewide emergency preparedness and review administrative rules governing state and local emergency management practices.

Summary of Bill: The Search and Rescue Grant Program is established to be administered by the Department, subject to funds appropriated for this specific purpose. The Department may adopt rules, in consultation with the Council, to administer the program.

The Search and Rescue Account (Account) is created to receive legislative appropriations, donations, gifts, grants, or funds directed to the Account from other public or private sources. The Account is subject to legislative appropriation for use by the Department to provide grants to search and rescue organizations for anticipated planning, equipment, training, exercise, and operations.

"Search and rescue organization" is defined as a Washington domestic nonprofit corporation organized under the Washington Nonprofit Corporation Act and registered with the Washington secretary of state, whose primary purpose is search and rescue, has its principal place of business established in a political subdivision of the state of Washington, is formally recognized by the local emergency management organization of that political subdivision as being available for participation in search and rescue activities, and whose members are registered as emergency workers with the political subdivision.

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 (State Government, Tribal Relations & Elections):

PRO: Rural locations in Washington State often require search and rescue operations. Washington state has an average of 975-1025 missions per year which include lost children, adults, injured climbers and many others. Hours are not tracked for missions, but on average a search takes about 10 hours and generally each search averages 15-25 responders which would mean that about 240,000 hours are given to the state of Washington to conduct these efforts. These hours do not take into account training time, time to repair gear, stock supplies and conduct other administrative duties. These volunteers maintain a lot of equipment and training on their own to be qualified to search. Volunteers are doers who are resourceful and never let lack of funding prohibit them from getting the work done, but with improved access to wilderness areas, the demand has only increased for quality search and rescue. This bill provides a funding source to assist with these activities.

Persons Testifying (State Government, Tribal Relations & Elections): PRO: Senator Dean Takko, Prime Sponsor; Jennifer Brenes, King County Search and Rescue; Bill Gillespie, Washington Search and Rescue Volunteer Advisory Council.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (State Government, Tribal Relations & Elections): No one.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Ways & Means): PRO: This bill is important to the search and rescue community as it will open doors to funding that could help alleviate costs for volunteers.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Jenny Knoth, AgForestry Class 41.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Ways & Means): No one.