

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1620

As Reported by House Committee On:
Community & Economic Development
Appropriations

Title: An act relating to responding to extreme weather events.

Brief Description: Addressing the response to extreme weather events.

Sponsors: Representatives Leavitt, Boehnke, Shewmake, Ryu, Robertson, Wicks, Duerr, Ramel, Valdez, Bronoske, Callan, Ramos, Rule, Santos, Simmons, Pollet, Hackney and Taylor.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Community & Economic Development: 1/12/22, 1/14/22 [DP];
Appropriations: 1/24/22, 1/27/22 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires the Military Department to develop and implement an extreme weather response grant program for the purpose of assisting with the costs of responding to community needs during periods of extremely hot or cold weather and poor air quality due to wildfire smoke.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Ryu, Chair; Paul, Vice Chair; Boehnke, Ranking Minority Member; Corry, Donaghy, Frame, Johnson, J., Rule and Taylor.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Chase, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Kraft and Sutherland.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Jacobsen.

Staff: Emily Poole (786-7106).

Background:

The state's role in disaster recovery depends on the complexity of an incident and the capacity of a local jurisdiction or tribe to manage recovery efforts. In general, the state functions as a coordinating entity for state and federal resources and facilitates relationships between jurisdictions, agencies and private organizations.

The Military Department (Department) leads and coordinates the state's preparedness, response, and recovery efforts to minimize the impacts of disasters and emergencies, including by coordinating a number of grants available to state and local jurisdictions. The Adjutant General is required to administer a state program for emergency assistance to individuals who are victims of a natural disaster. Natural disasters include events that demand immediate action to protect public health or to provide relief to affected communities, as well as events that reach such a degree of destructiveness as to warrant the governor proclaiming a state of emergency. The emergency assistance program may include grants, loans, gifts of services, equipment, supplies, or funds to individuals who need assistance and who meet certain eligibility standards. Funds from the Disaster Response Account in the state treasury may be used for support of state agency and local government disaster response and recovery efforts.

Summary of Bill:

The Military Department (Department) is required to develop and implement an extreme weather response grant program for the purpose of assisting political subdivisions and federally recognized tribes with the costs of responding to community needs during periods of extremely hot or cold weather. The Department may adopt rules to administer the program. The Department may award grants to political subdivisions and federally recognized tribes for reimbursement of costs if the costs are incurred:

1. by communities that have demonstrated a lack of local resources to address community needs; and
2. for the benefit of socially vulnerable populations.

Costs associated with the following activities are eligible for reimbursement:

- establishing and operating warming and cooling centers;
- transporting individuals to warming and cooling centers;
- purchasing supplies needed for cooling of congregate living settings;
- providing emergency temporary housing; and
- other related activities necessary for life safety.

Funds from the Disaster Response Account may be used to award grants as part of the extreme weather response grant program.

For purposes of these requirements, "political subdivision" means any county, city, or town that has established a local organization for emergency management or any joint local organization for emergency management.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Periods of extreme weather are becoming more common. Local jurisdictions are often unprepared to meet community needs during extremely hot or cold weather, and rural and small communities often face a greater impact. It is also difficult for local communities to make funding decisions regarding unpredictable weather. Cities have to balance setting aside funding for emergencies and using those same funds for other community needs. This bill will help communities make funding decisions and offset the costs of providing life-saving services. Temporary housing solutions provided to individuals can lead to permanent housing solutions. It is important for individuals experiencing homelessness to be called out in emergency management policies. Emergency shelters should have additional outreach capabilities in order to be successful, but adding capabilities increases costs. The bill should be fully funded.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) Local communities face obstacles in setting up warming and cooling centers, including that it is difficult to find suitable locations that are secure and easily accessible. It is also difficult to balance increasing capacity with considerations relating to COVID-19.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Mari Leavitt, prime sponsor; Sharon Swanson, Association of Washington Cities; Hallie McCurdy, West Pierce Fire and Rescue; Maureen Howard, Tacoma Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness; and Briahna Murray, City of Tacoma.

(Other) Adam Wasserman, Washington Emergency Management Division.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 20 members: Representatives Ormsby, Chair; Bergquist, Vice Chair; Gregerson, Vice Chair; Macri, Vice Chair; Corry, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Cody, Dolan, Fitzgibbon, Frame, Hansen, Harris, Johnson, J., Lekanoff, Pollet, Ryu, Senn, Springer, Stonier, Sullivan and Tharinger.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Stokesbary, Ranking Minority Member; Chambers, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chandler, Dye, Jacobsen, Schmick and Steele.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 3 members: Representatives MacEwen, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Caldier and Rude.

Staff: Jessica Van Horne (786-7288).

Summary of Recommendation of Committee On Appropriations Compared to Recommendation of Committee On Community & Economic Development:

The Military Department may provide funding for costs of responding to community needs during periods of poor air quality due to wildfire smoke in addition to periods of extremely hot or cold weather.

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) Local governments such as cities and counties are seeing multiple incidents of extreme weather each year, including heat waves and cold snaps. Extreme weather will continue to be a factor due to climate change. The most vulnerable residents already have little access to shelter. During the pandemic, many vulnerable people have had no options other than a government-operated heating or cooling shelter. Individuals have died due to not having access to a heating or cooling shelter.

Standing up a heating or cooling shelter can be very costly for cities and other local governments due to the unpredictability of when it will be needed. One city estimates it cost an average of \$40,000 per month to stand up their emergency shelter. Many smaller jurisdictions want to open these shelters, but do not have sufficient resources to do so.

Local governments like fire districts, which play a coordinating role in emergency response on behalf of small or unincorporated communities, often do not have dedicated funds for heating or cooling shelters and must tap into their general funds. There is a financial component to when emergency response agencies determine when to open a heating or cooling shelter. By providing state resources, the proposed program would help local governments meet the need for shelter. Local governments also support allowing funds to be used to respond to incidents where there is poor air quality due to wildfire smoke.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) Washington is not immune to extreme weather events. Ensuring there are warming and cooling shelters in addition to other types of shelter is critical for preserving life and safety. Local emergency managers face many obstacles in operating these shelters. This program would assist local governments in their response to declared disasters when they have demonstrated a lack of local resources.

Persons Testifying: Sharon Swanson, Association of Washington Cities; Zack Zappone, Spokane City Council; Kristina Walker, Tacoma City Council; Hallie McCurdy, West Pierce Fire and Rescue; Maureen Howard, Tacoma Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness; and Mac Nicholson, King County.

(Other) Adam Wasserman, Washington Emergency Management Division.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.