

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 5376

As Passed Senate, February 26, 2021

Title: An act relating to promoting awareness of the governor's office of the education ombuds.

Brief Description: Promoting awareness of the governor's office of the education ombuds.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Early Learning & K-12 Education (originally sponsored by Senators Wilson, C., Wellman, Conway, Das, Hunt, Kuderer, Lias, Nobles and Saldaña).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 2/01/21, 2/08/21 [DPS].

Floor Activity: Passed Senate: 2/26/21, 44-3.

Brief Summary of First Substitute Bill

- Requires public schools to annually notify parents, students, and school employees about the services available through the Office of the Education Ombuds (OEO).
- Tasks OEO with developing a template of the notification information with translation into Spanish and include other languages as resources allow.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5376 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Wellman, Chair; Nobles, Vice Chair, K-12; Wilson, C., Vice Chair, Early Learning; Hawkins, Ranking Member; Dozier, Hunt, McCune, Mullet and Pedersen.

Staff: Ailey Kato (786-7434)

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.

Background: In 2006, the Office of the Education Ombuds (OEO) within the Office of the Governor was created. OEO's purpose is to provide information to parents, students, and others regarding their rights and responsibilities with respect to the state's public elementary and secondary system and advocating on behalf of students.

OEO has the following powers and duties:

- develop parental involvement materials and identify obstacles and recommend strategies for greater parent and community involvement;
- identify and recommend strategies for improving the success rates of ethnic and racial student groups and students with disabilities, with disproportionate academic achievement;
- refer complainants and others to appropriate resources, agencies, or departments;
- facilitate the resolution of complaints made by parents and students;
- consult with representatives of certain organizations and groups;
- serve as lead agency to provide resources and tools about public school anti-harassment policies and strategies; and
- perform such other functions consistent with the purpose of OEO.

OEO must treat all matters as confidential except as necessary to enable the OEO to perform the duties of the office.

Summary of First Substitute Bill: At least annually, public schools must notify parents or guardians; students, including students in residential schools, detention facilities, and adult correctional facilities; and school employees about the services available through OEO.

Beginning September 1, 2021, each public school must:

- include a link on its website to OEO's website with a description of the services; or
- provide a description of the services and OEO's contact information in existing materials shared annually such as, welcome packets, orientation guides, and newsletters.

Public schools are encouraged to take both of these actions.

OEO must annually develop and make a template of the notification information available upon request. OEO must translate this template into Spanish and include other languages as resources allow.

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: OEO can connect families to resources and supports, but people need to know this office exists. During COVID-19, families have been struggling with issues such as attendance, child care, quality of instruction, Internet connectivity, transitions, enrollment, choice and transfer, language access, academic progress, homelessness, foster care, special education, and school and teacher misconduct. OEO is an independent office that can support families with these issues and improve the educational system, but more awareness of this office is needed.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Claire Wilson, Prime Sponsor; Carrie Basas, Governor's Office of the Education Ombuds.

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