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**HOUSE BILL 1461**

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**State of Washington 68th Legislature 2023 Regular Session**

**By** Representatives Maycumber, Riccelli, Volz, Ormsby, Corry, Christian, Rude, Schmidt, Graham, Caldier, Eslick, Davis, and Leavitt

AN ACT Relating to a pilot project for providing basic law enforcement training in eastern Washington; adding a new section to chapter 43.101 RCW; creating a new section; and providing an expiration date.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The legislature finds that Washington is experiencing a crisis in public safety. Recent research suggests that Washington has the lowest ratio of law enforcement officers to residents compared to any other state in the nation. Recruitment and hiring of new officers has become increasingly challenging, due in part to excessive delays in accessing the state's basic law enforcement academy. After an agency hires a new officer, he or she waits many months for an opening at the academy. Even though a new hire cannot be deployed in the field, agencies must pay his or her salary to prevent him or her from seeking employment elsewhere. Law enforcement agencies struggle with shouldering the costs of these wait times, while also attempting to compete with one another for qualified candidates. Agencies in eastern Washington have been especially impacted because of the logistical and financial burden of sending new hires across the state to participate in the basic law enforcement academy.

The legislature recognizes the critical role of law enforcement to functional government, and now more than ever, there is an urgent need for officers with the expertise to respond to mental health crises in the field. To ensure safe interactions between officers and those in crisis, the state should incentivize qualified professionals to seek careers in law enforcement, while also providing timely, accessible, comprehensive, and evidence-based training.

Therefore, the legislature hereby directs the criminal justice training commission to conduct a pilot project to host classes of the basic law enforcement academy in eastern Washington. The pilot project will not only provide additional necessary classes, but it will also improve access and support to agencies in eastern Washington. The legislature intends for the pilot project to use innovative, needs-based approaches for training the next generation of officers who will serve communities in eastern Washington.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 43.101 RCW to read as follows:

(1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the commission shall conduct a pilot project for providing the basic law enforcement academy program in eastern Washington. The pilot project must:

(a) Be conducted from July 1, 2023, through July 1, 2026, with at least three classes offered each fiscal year, each of which must include at least 30 students for the purpose of meeting statewide demand for trained law enforcement officers;

(b) Be located east of the crest of the Cascade mountains in a county with a population of at least 400,000;

(c) Admit students exclusively from law enforcement agencies serving, in whole or in part, a jurisdiction or jurisdictions east of the crest of the Cascade mountains;

(d) Meet all of the requirements of this chapter, except the commission may modify or suspend regulatory requirements and other policies to explore innovative approaches to law enforcement training;

(e) Consider incorporating mental health and de-escalation training based on national best practices established by the commission on accreditation for law enforcement agencies and other appropriate organizations; and

(f) Use locally based trainers and local law enforcement facilities when appropriate.

(2) The commission shall submit an initial report by November 1, 2024, and a final report by November 1, 2026, to the appropriate committees of the legislature and the governor. The report must include, at a minimum: A summary of the classes, including participating agencies and number of trainees; the benefits and costs of conducting the training in eastern Washington, which must also include cost savings to local agencies; and any other findings and recommendations, which may include, if appropriate, a proposal for a permanent expansion of the academy to eastern Washington.

(3) This section expires July 1, 2027.

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