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**HOUSE BILL 1718**

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

**By** Representatives Rule, Mena, Leavitt, Paul, Bronoske, Lekanoff, Reed, Pollet, and Timmons

AN ACT Relating to creating the "parks Rx" health and wellness pilot programs; creating new sections; and providing an expiration date.

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The legislature finds that one of the best and most cost-effective ways for the residents of Washington state to achieve physical and mental health, and to prevent costly diseases and conditions such as diabetes, obesity, heart disease, and other coronary conditions, is to get regular exercise and physical activity. In fact, as part of a study done for the recreation and conservation office on the benefits of trail-based activities, the University of Washington conducted a literature review of over 100 studies that identified evidence of a close linkage between health benefits and being outdoors. The literature review further found that the health benefits of nature "may be particularly impactful for the 12.2 percent who have incomes below the poverty level."

(2) The legislature further finds that for all residents, public parks and trails, recreation programs, and open spaces offer equitable, no-cost, or low-cost options for all people to be active and healthy, with these spaces receiving record levels of use during the COVID-19 pandemic.

(3) The legislature finds that it can harness the equitable, low-cost, or no-cost opportunities provided by parks and recreation spaces, and build upon successful programs established in areas such as the East Bay of California and Pittsburgh, and the states of Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Utah, by establishing a program in Washington state through which parks and recreation officials, health care providers, as well as public and community health advocates can work collaboratively to design a program that will incentivize residents, particularly those from communities experiencing inequities or without ready access to physical fitness facilities, to regularly use public parks and recreation sites, facilities and programs to enable better physical and mental health outcomes, and decrease visits to hospitals and clinics.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The department of health shall create an advisory committee for the "parks Rx" health and wellness pilot programs and the membership of the committee shall include communities that have been historically marginalized in access to parks.

(2) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the secretary of health, in collaboration with the advisory committee for the "parks Rx" health and wellness pilot programs, shall:

(a) Establish a minimum of three pilot programs using the recommendations from the 2022 department of health task force report to create an operational program structure and hire staff personnel. The two-year pilot programs must be located in each of the following regions of Washington state: Puget Sound, eastern Washington, and southwest Washington regions;

(b) Develop a competitive request for proposal process to select the pilot programs and begin the process by or before February 1, 2024;

(c) Review the pilot program applications and select the pilot programs by August 1, 2024;

(d) Create an evaluation criteria for the request for proposal process that strongly focuses on:

(i) Identifying populations experiencing the greatest health care disparities;

(ii) Forming partnerships with health and wellness providers;

(iii) Working with leaders of disadvantaged communities to bring lived experience perspectives;

(iv) Conducting outreach to local governments and organizations that can provide fitness spaces, trails, community centers, and other similar facilities for usage; and

(v) Developing a data-gathering and measuring system to evaluate the program's effectiveness and impact on the health and well-being of individuals and communities;

(e) Submit a report to the governor and relevant committees of the legislature in compliance with RCW 43.01.036 by July 1, 2027. The report shall contain at a minimum, the following:

(i) An assessment of the performance for each pilot program during the two-year period noting the successes, challenges, and current gaps within the pilot programs that include measuring community engagement and identifying current community and organization partnerships and potential areas of improvement;

(ii) An impact assessment of the three-region pilot programs on community and individual health and well-being, taking into consideration a review of the different ways individuals may experience health impacts of being outdoors depending on history, culture, and other social determinants of health;

(iii) An analysis of the pilot program that identifies the resources and tools needed to ensure the long-term sustainability of the program including estimates for the appropriate level of staffing, capital, and operational and maintenance efforts needed for the program to continue operating; and

(iv) Recommendations on potential funding and resource options that, at minimum, include federal funding opportunities, grants and loans, corporate and civic donations, as well as state funding, if necessary.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  This act expires August 1, 2027.

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