H-2579.1

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**HOUSE BILL 2373**

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**State of Washington 68th Legislature 2024 Regular Session**

**By** Representatives Ramos and Nance

AN ACT Relating to modifying the adopt-a-highway program to further the purpose of civic engagement and collaboration; amending RCW 47.40.100; and creating new sections.

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The legislature recognizes that the state's adopt-a-highway program has enabled individuals and groups to participate in keeping the state's highways clean and that the program has been successful for over 30 years in helping to reduce litter in Washington. The legislature further finds that the program would benefit from a renewed focus on its goal of instilling citizen participation in supporting the state in carrying out a core governmental function of keeping our roadways clean. The legislature believes that the purpose of the program is to further the spirit of civic partnership in the community, and that the signs on which a participant's name may be displayed are intended to further this purpose rather than to function as taxpayer-funded advertising for a business or organization.

The legislature intends, therefore, to refocus the adopt-a-highway program to emphasize that the program is a public-private partnership between the state and its citizens in carrying out the government function of keeping our roadways clean. Participation in the program should demonstrate a commitment by an individual or group to partner with and support the government of the state of Washington in keeping its roads litter free for the benefit of all roadway users.

In carrying out this public-private partnership, the legislature intends for the Washington state department of transportation to communicate that individuals and groups working to keep state roads free of litter are working collaboratively with the department to perform a core government function. The legislature intends for any roadside signage or recognition of such volunteers by the department of transportation to be an opportunity for the government to acknowledge and promote the public-private partnership it has entered into with individuals or groups, rather than to advertise a business or organization.

To that end, the legislature intends to: (1) Refocus the adopt-a-highway program as a public-private partnership to satisfy a core government function; (2) modify adopt-a-highway signage to emphasize the recognition of that government partnership; and (3) ensure that program participants selected to participate in the public-private partnership do not undercut the spirit of civic engagement and collaboration being furthered by the program.

**Sec.**  RCW 47.40.100 and 2019 c 353 s 11 are each amended to read as follows:

(1)(a) The department of transportation shall establish a statewide adopt-a-highway program. The purpose of the program is to ((~~provide~~)) solicit volunteers ((~~and businesses an opportunity~~)), whether individuals or groups, to partner with the department to contribute to a cleaner environment, enhanced roadsides, and protection of wildlife habitats. Participating volunteers ((~~and businesses shall~~)) may be selected to adopt department-designated sections of state highways, rest areas, park and ride lots, intermodal facilities, and any other facilities the department deems appropriate, in accordance with rules adopted by the department. The department may elect to coordinate a consortium of participants for adopt-a-highway projects.

(b) The adopt-a-highway program shall include, at a minimum, litter control for the adopted section, and may include additional responsibilities such as planting and maintaining vegetation, controlling weeds, graffiti removal, and any other roadside improvement or clean-up activities the department deems appropriate. Whenever possible, when planting and maintaining vegetation, volunteers ((~~and businesses~~)) should use native forage plants that are pollen-rich or nectar-rich and beneficial for all pollinators, including honey bees, in order to develop habitat beneficial for the feeding, nesting, and reproduction of pollinators. The department shall not accept adopt-a-highway proposals that would have the effect of terminating classified employees or classified employee positions.

(2) A volunteer individual or group ((~~or business choosing~~)) that would like to participate in the adopt-a-highway program must submit a proposal to the department. The department shall ((~~review~~)) determine whether to partner with the applicant by reviewing the proposal for consistency with departmental policy and rules. The department may accept, reject, or modify an applicant's proposal.

(3) The department shall seek partnerships with ((~~volunteer groups and businesses~~)) volunteers to facilitate the goals of this section. The department may solicit funding for the adopt-a-highway program that allows private entities to undertake all or a portion of financing for the initiatives. The department shall develop guidelines regarding the cash, labor, and in-kind contributions to be performed by the participants.

(4) The department shall not partner with the following applicants:

(a) An organization whose name: ((~~(a)~~)) (i) Endorses or opposes a particular candidate for public office, ((~~(b)~~)) (ii) advocates a position on a specific political issue, initiative, referendum, or piece of legislation, or ((~~(c)~~)) (iii) includes a reference to a political party ((~~shall not be eligible to participate in the adopt-a-highway program~~)); or

(b) An individual or group, or a local chapter of a group, that publicly endorses or promotes unlawful violence against the government, a message that is contrary to the adopt-a-highway program's promotion of citizen participation to support core government functions.

(5) In administering the adopt-a-highway program, the department shall:

(a) Provide a standardized application form, registration form, and contractual agreement for all participating ((~~groups~~)) volunteers. The forms shall notify the prospective participants of the risks and responsibilities to be assumed by the department and the participants;

(b) Require all participants to be at least ((~~fifteen~~)) 15 years of age;

(c) Require parental consent for all minors;

(d) Require at least one adult supervisor for every eight minors;

(e) Require one designated leader for each participating ((~~organization~~)) group, unless the department chooses to coordinate a consortium of participants;

(f) Assign each participating ((~~organization~~)) volunteer a section or sections of state highway, or other state-owned transportation facilities, for a specified period of time;

(g) Recognize the ((~~efforts of a~~)) state's partnership with participating ((~~organization~~)) volunteers by erecting and maintaining signs with the ((~~organization's~~)) volunteers' name on both ends of the ((~~organization's~~)) volunteers' section of highway to notify the public of the department's collaboration with the volunteers. Such signs are government speech in which the department shall recognize the volunteers' participation in the public-private partnership; the signs are not intended to function primarily as advertising for a group or business, and the department may not construe them as advertising when soliciting applicants to the program;

(h) Provide appropriate safety equipment. Safety equipment issued to participating ((~~groups~~)) volunteers must be returned to the department upon termination of the applicable adopt-a-highway agreement;

(i) Provide safety training for all participants;

(j) Pay any and all premiums or assessments required under RCW 51.12.035 to secure medical aid benefits under chapter 51.36 RCW for all volunteers participating in the program;

(k) Require participating businesses to pay all employer premiums or assessments required to secure medical aid benefits under chapter 51.36 RCW for all employees or agents participating in the program;

(l) Maintain records of all injuries and accidents that occur;

(m) Adopt rules that establish a process to resolve any question of ((~~an organization's~~)) volunteers' eligibility to participate in the adopt-a-highway program;

(n) Obtain permission from property owners who lease right-of-way before allowing ((~~an organization~~)) volunteers to adopt a section of highway on such leased property; and

(o) Establish procedures and guidelines for the adopt-a-highway program.

(6) Nothing in this section affects the rights or activities of, or agreements with, adjacent landowners, including the use of rights-of-way and crossings, nor impairs these rights and uses by the placement of signs.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The department of transportation shall review its existing contracts with volunteers under the adopt-a-highway program as of the effective date of this section to determine whether volunteers are in compliance with the terms of this act.

(2) The department shall immediately terminate contracts in effect with volunteers that it determines are not eligible to participate under this act upon conducting the review authorized in subsection (1) of this section.

(3) Volunteers participating in the adopt-a-highway program as of the effective date of this section who remain eligible to participate in the program are not required to reapply to continue their participation in the program.

**--- END ---**