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**SENATE BILL 5830**

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

**By** Senators Lovick, Boehnke, Hasegawa, Kuderer, Salomon, Torres, and Warnick

AN ACT Relating to establishing the Washington state commission on boys and men; and adding a new chapter to Title 43 RCW.

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The legislature finds it necessary to establish a Washington state commission on boys and men tasked with addressing the well-being of Washington's boys, male youth, and men. Data disaggregated by sex or gender show that Washington's male population experience a breadth of disparities in key indicators of well-being, including educational achievement, suicide, homelessness, drug and alcohol addiction and overdose, and incarceration.

In the 2022 point-in-time count for Washington, 63 percent of individuals experiencing homelessness were male. Of the people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, 70 percent were male. The legislature finds that dismantling barriers and challenges, such as drug use, that lead to homelessness among male youth and men is crucial in helping them obtain and maintain health and economic security.

Substance abuse is a key driver of unemployment, homelessness, and poor health. The national institute on drug abuse found that men are more likely than women to use almost all types of illicit drugs, and illicit drug use is more likely to result in emergency room visits or overdose deaths for men. The Washington state department of health found that, between 2018 and 2021, 67 percent of the 6,434 people who died from a drug overdose were male. The national center for drug abuse statistics reports that 66 percent of the 10,507 people who died from excessive alcohol use in Washington between 2017 and 2021 were male. The legislature finds that addiction is a precursor to incarceration and that a commission tasked with examining risk factors that lead to drug use among males and strategies for drug prevention is crucial to reduce drug addictions and break the cycle of incarceration for this population.

The legislature finds that gender-based disparities are seen in the criminal justice system. The Washington state department of children, youth, and families states that, between 2019 and 2021, males were 91 percent of the individuals who spent time in a juvenile rehabilitation facility. Their average length of stay, 361 days, was 145 days longer than the average length of stay for female youth. Data reported by the Washington association of sheriffs and police chiefs showed that in 2021 men accounted for 88 percent of people in Washington's county, regional, city, and tribal jails. In addition, a 2021 report stated that 94 percent of people confined in the department of corrections facilities in Washington were male.

The legislature finds that a variety of risk factors and exposure to neglect and maltreatment experienced by boys and male youth contribute to an increased risk of their incarceration. A 2016 systematic review of 62 prospective and longitudinal studies that looked at the association between exposure to maltreatment during childhood or adolescence and subsequent delinquent behavior found that, for males, and only in part for females, maltreatment gives rise to other risk factors that are then associated with criminal offending. A 2008 study included in the systematic review found that neglect emerged as a strong predictor for a range of different types of criminal offenses, and neglect was more influential in the pathway to delinquency for males. The legislature finds that it is imperative to establish a commission tasked with examining risk factors commonly experienced by boys, male youth, and men and to use the information to inform policies and practices, eliminate risk factors, improve outcomes for victims of maltreatment and neglect, and reduce incarceration rates for males.

In addition to being incarcerated at higher rates, the Washington association of sheriffs and police chiefs found that in 2021 males were the majority of victims of violent crimes and accounted for 74 percent of homicide victims in the state. In addition, as of December 2022, 56 percent of Washington's 2,354 missing persons were male, according to the Washington state patrol. Nearly half of missing indigenous persons are men or male youth. A report issued in 2022 by Washington's missing and murdered indigenous women and people task force included a recommendation to focus more attention on violence that indigenous males experience.

There are wide gender gaps at all levels of education, with boys and men trailing girls and women. In 2019, the office of the superintendent of public instruction reported that male youth in Washington dropped out of high school at higher rates than female youth. It also found that boys and male youth are suspended or expelled at higher rates than girls and female youth, which results in more disruptions in their education and increases their risk of falling behind. A commission on boys and men tasked with examining gender-based learning needs and educating policymakers about educational tools and solutions tailored to address the specific needs of boys and male youth is necessary to close the achievement gap in the Washington education system.

The legislature also finds that children in prekindergarten through fifth grade benefit from gender diversity among the teaching staff at their schools. A 2018 evaluation of student survey data showed that students who were assigned to teachers of the same gender reported positive benefits in the areas of personal effort, happiness in class, feeling cared for and motivated by their teacher, quality of student-teacher communication, and college aspirations. During the 2021-22 academic year, men were fewer than one out of every five teachers of prekindergarten through fifth grade in Washington's public schools.

The legislature finds that a gender-based disparity exists in the rates of suicide. Males accounted for 77 percent of suicide deaths in Washington from 2010-2019 according to the Washington state department of health. Males are the majority of suicide deaths in all age groups ranging from between 10 and 14 years old to 85 years and older. The legislature finds that services such as mental health counseling can be effective early intervention strategies for mental health care. In Washington, there are three female licensed mental health counselors for every one male licensed mental health counselor. The legislature finds that a commission on boys and men is necessary to examine the causes for the high suicide rate among males and assess best practices and solutions for reducing suicides by males.

Besides teaching and mental health care, the legislature finds that men are underrepresented in certain other professions of public importance. Social workers play a critical role in connecting people to government programs and services. Only 16 percent of Washington's licensed social workers are men. The department of health reported that of the estimated 62,394 registered nurses in Washington in 2019, only 12 percent were male.

The legislature finds that it is important to establish a commission on boys and men tasked with developing strategies to encourage men and male youth to consider careers in teaching, mental health care, social work, nursing, and other professions where the workforce severely lacks male participation.

The legislature also finds that improvements are needed around parenting equity and father engagement. In 2015, the fatherhood project cited numerous studies that found that people with actively involved father figures during childhood not only experience beneficial outcomes in childhood, such as greater academic success, positive social behavior, and reduced contact with the juvenile justice system, but they also are more successful in their careers and marriages and are better able to handle stress as an adult. The legislature finds that a commission on boys and men tasked with examining obstacles that prevent a father's involvement in his children's lives and advocating for policies that reduce the chances that a father will be absent in his children's lives is necessary for achieving better short-term and long-term outcomes for all Washington youth. The legislature intends for the commission on boys and men to cooperate with the Washington fatherhood council and other entities striving to improve outcomes for children through greater involvement of fathers.

The legislature intends to create a Washington state commission on boys and men to serve as a focal point in state government to better identify and measure factors impacting the well-being of boys, male youth, and men. The legislature intends to promote a collaborative effort between the commission on boys and men, women's commission, LGBTQ commission, human rights commission, and other commissions to achieve equal opportunity for all Washington residents.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The Washington state commission on boys and men is established. In carrying out its duties under this chapter, the commission may only focus its efforts on the following five areas: Education; jobs, careers, and financial health; fatherhood, family, and relationships; physical and mental health; and the experiences of males in the criminal justice system and other court systems.

(2) The commission must be administered by an executive director who must be appointed by, and serve at the pleasure of, the governor. The executive director shall have demonstrated work in, and an understanding of, at least one of the five focus areas described under subsection (1) of this section as it applies to issues impacting the well-being of boys, male youth, and men. The governor shall set the salary of the executive director. The executive director may employ staff for the commission as needed. The salaries of the executive director and staff must be comparable to those of similar positions in other state commissions.

(3) Pertaining to the five focus areas described in subsection (1) of this section, the executive director of the commission shall:

(a) Monitor state legislation, and advocate for legislation which may positively impact boys, male youth, and men;

(b) Work with state agencies to assess programs and policies that tangibly and directly impact boys, male youth, and men and propose solutions that may provide improved outcomes;

(c) Coordinate and collaborate with the women's commission, LGBTQ commission, human rights commission, and other commissions to address issues of mutual concern;

(d) Work as a liaison between the public and private sector to improve the well-being of boys, male youth, and men;

(e) Maintain a list of eligible nominees for membership on the commission who have demonstrated expertise and interest in issues impacting boys, male youth, and men, and nominate such individuals for consideration; and

(f) Hire staff, contract with a third-party consultant, or collaborate with the office of equity to develop indices and metrics to measure the well-being of Washington's male population.

(4) If the commission elects to collaborate with the office of equity pursuant to subsection (3)(f) of this section, the office of equity shall assist the commission upon request.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The Washington state commission on boys and men shall consist of nine nonlegislative voting members. The speaker of the house of representatives and the minority leader of the house of representatives shall each appoint two nonlegislative members to the commission. The president of the senate and the minority leader of the senate shall each appoint two nonlegislative members to the commission. The governor shall appoint one nonlegislative member to the commission, with the advice and consent of the senate. In making such appointments, all appointing authorities shall give due consideration to nominations submitted by the executive director.

(2) The appointing authorities may only appoint members who have demonstrated work in, and an understanding of, at least one of the five focus areas described under section 2(1) of this act as it applies to issues impacting the well-being of boys, male youth, and men.

(3) At the commission's first meeting, each appointed voting member shall draw lots to determine the length of time they will serve on the commission. Of the persons initially appointed to the commission, three members shall serve one year, three shall serve two years, and three shall serve three years. Upon expiration of such terms, subsequent appointments must be for three years. Any vacancies occurring in the membership of the commission must be filled for the remainder of the unexpired term in the same manner as the original appointments. In no case may any voting member serve more than three years without formal reappointment by the appropriate appointing authority.

(4) Two members of the senate, one from each of the two major political parties, appointed by the president of the senate, and two members of the house of representatives, one from each of the two major political parties, appointed by the speaker of the house of representatives, shall serve as nonvoting members in an advisory capacity. The appointing authorities shall appoint members who have demonstrated an interest in furthering the purpose of the commission. All legislative advisory members shall serve a two-year term and the position of any legislative advisory member is vacated whenever such member ceases to be a member of the house from which the member was appointed.

(5)(a) Nonlegislative members of the commission must be reimbursed for expenses incurred in the performance of their duties in accordance with RCW 43.03.050 and 43.03.060.

(b) Legislative members of the commission must be reimbursed for expenses incurred in the performance of their duties in accordance with RCW 44.04.120.

(6) A simple majority of the commission's voting membership constitutes a quorum for the purpose of conducting business.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) Within the five focus areas described in section 2(1) of this act, the Washington state commission on boys and men shall have the following duties:

(a) Provide a clearinghouse for information regarding state legislation as it relates to the purpose of this chapter;

(b) Identify and define specific needs of boys, male youth, and men and provide recommendations for addressing those needs in reports to the legislature and governor under (c) of this subsection, and on an ongoing basis;

(c) Submit a report to the appropriate committees of the legislature and the governor every year, in compliance with RCW 43.01.036, detailing the commission's activities;

(d) Consult with state agencies regarding the effects of agency policies, procedures, practices, laws, and administrative rules on the unique problems and needs of boys, male youth, and men. The commission shall also advise such state agencies on the development and implementation of comprehensive and coordinated policies, plans, and programs focusing on those problems and needs;

(e) Gather data and provide resource and referral information to agencies and the public in order to implement the purposes of this chapter;

(f) Hold public hearings to gather input on issues related to the unique problems and needs of boys, male youth, and men; and

(g) Advocate for the removal of legal and social barriers for boys, male youth, and men.

(2) To inform public policy, the commission may consult with nonprofit organizations and faith-based organizations that specialize in or provide services relating to one of the five focus areas described in section 2(1) of this act.

(3) State agencies must provide assistance to the commission upon request, including gathering and providing data and information, to carry out the purposes of this chapter.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The Washington state commission on boys and men may receive gifts, grants, and endowments from public or private sources that are made for the use or benefit of the commission and to expend them and any income derived from them according to their terms and the purposes of this chapter. The commission's executive director shall make a report of such funds received from private sources to the office of financial management on a semiannual basis. Funds received from private sources must not be applied to reduce or substitute for the commission's budget as appropriated by the legislature but must be applied and expended toward projects and functions authorized by this chapter that were not funded by the legislature.

(2) In carrying out its duties, the commission may enter into agreements with public and private institutions, local governments, private industry, community organizations, and other segments of the general public as needed for the purposes of this chapter.

(3) The commission may adopt rules pursuant to chapter 34.05 RCW as necessary to implement the purposes of this chapter.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  Sections 1 through 5 of this act constitute a new chapter in Title 43 RCW.

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