
Housing Committee

HB 2457

Brief Description: Concerning emergency housing for domestic violence survivors.

Sponsors: Representatives Davis, Ryu, Rule, Santos, Chopp, Barkis and Pollet.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Creates the Domestic Violence Emergency Housing Voucher Program to assist in obtaining stable housing for people fleeing from intimate partner violence.
- Directs the Department of Commerce to establish a grant program to acquire or renovate housing units for emergency housing for individuals who are at risk from intimate partner violence.
- Creates a task force to propose recommendations to increase the supply of short-term housing for survivors fleeing intimate partner violence.

Hearing Date:

Staff: Austin Borcharding (786-7094).

Background:

The Office of Crime Victims Advocacy (OCVA) was established within the Department of Commerce (Commerce) in 2012. The OCVA is directed to perform the following functions:

- assist communities in planning and implementing services for crime victims;
- advocate on behalf of crime victims in obtaining needed services and resources;
- advise local and state governments on practices, policies, and priorities that impact crime victims; and
- administer grant programs for services to victims of crime and prevention activities as

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authorized by state or federal legislation, budget, or executive order.

Commerce is authorized to distribute grant funds for serving the victims of sexual assault. This funding may only go to activities which:

- provide effective services to victims of sexual assault;
- increase access to and availability of services for victims of sexual assault, particularly if from underserved populations; and
- create or build on efforts by existing community programs, coordinate those efforts, or develop cooperative efforts or other initiatives to make the most effective use of resources to provide treatment services to these victims.

A "community-based domestic violence program" is a nonprofit program or organization that provides assistance and advocacy for domestic violence (DV) victims as its primary purpose.

Summary of Bill:

The Domestic Violence Emergency Housing Voucher Program

The Domestic Violence Emergency Housing Voucher Program (DVHV) is created within the OCVA. The purpose of the DVHV is to provide vouchers to assist people who are fleeing intimate partner violence in obtaining stable housing. The DVHV is directed to give priority to survivors who face the greatest risk of serious violence and have the least access to housing resources.

Domestic Violence Housing Grant Program

The Department of Commerce (Commerce) is directed to establish a competitive grant program to award funding to community-based domestic violence programs. The purpose of this funding is to enable the recipients to acquire or renovate housing units to be used as emergency housing for individuals who are in immediate risk or imminent danger from intimate partner violence.

Commerce must evaluate applications for grants under the grant program in collaboration with the Department of Social and Health Services, strive for equal geographic distribution of funds, and prioritize projects that demonstrate the following:

- a strong readiness to proceed to operation of the emergency housing;
- a commitment by the applicant to provide furnishings and other support services to the tenants; and
- that the program for which grant funds are being requested has a high demand for emergency shelter services or hotel vouchers.

Contracts formed for the distribution of grant funds under the program must include provisions that the capitol improvements for which the funds were granted be held for an appropriate period of time after the grant is made, and that they be used for the purposes for which the grant was given during that time.

Domestic Violence Emergency Housing Task Force

A task force is formed to study and present recommendations on ways to increase supply of immediate, short-term, secure housing options for survivors fleeing imminent danger due to intimate partner violence.

In addition to other ideas, the task force must consider:

- the following potential means of providing housing to DV survivors:
 - creating a network of trained volunteers who possess appropriate additional living quarters and are willing to take in survivors;
 - a program where owners of short-term vacation rentals could lend their properties for a fixed number of nights per year;
 - a network of faith-based organizations that would allow suitable properties owned by a house of worship to be used for this purpose; and
 - using fairgrounds for this purpose.
- whether property tax incentives would be an effective means of encouraging participation; and
- the feasibility of launching a program patterned after the Los Angeles County Fire Safe House Program, wherein domestic violence victims in immediate danger could seek temporary shelter at fire stations.

Membership of the task force is as follows:

- four survivors who have experienced housing instability as a result of fleeing an intimate partner violence situation. At least two of these members must be survivors who fled with minor children;
- four community-based domestic violence agencies;
- two victim advocates embedded in law enforcement who work with survivors of intimate partner violence;
- two victim advocates embedded in prosecutor's offices who work with survivors of intimate partner violence;
- the executive director, or the director's designee, of a nonprofit law firm in Washington that seeks to improve the legal response to survivors of sexual violence;
- a representative from a statewide nonprofit law firm which offers publicly funded legal aid programs that work with survivors of intimate partner violence;
- the director, or the director's designee, of an advocacy unit within the prosecutor's office of the most populous county in Washington that assists residents who are experiencing domestic violence by a current or former intimate partner as they navigate the protection order process; and
- the executive director, or the director's designee, of a coalition based in Washington which provides culturally specific technical assistance to tribes and tribal programs in the work of preventing and eliminating domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, and sex trafficking.

The task force shall report its findings and recommendations to the legislature by December 1, 2025.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 23, 2024

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.