

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5561

As Reported by House Committee On:
Appropriations

Title: An act relating to extending the expiration date of the law enforcement community engagement grant project.

Brief Description: Extending the expiration date of the law enforcement community engagement grant project.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Law & Justice (originally sponsored by Senators Conway, Pedersen, Lovick, Dhingra, Hasegawa, Lias, Saldaña, Valdez and Wagoner).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Appropriations: 3/16/23, 3/22/23 [DP].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Extends the expiration date for the Law Enforcement Community Engagement Grant Project (Project) from January 1, 2024, to January 1, 2029.
- Expands the scope of the Project to include all rural and urban counties across Washington.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 31 members: Representatives Ormsby, Chair; Bergquist, Vice Chair; Gregerson, Vice Chair; Macri, Vice Chair; Stokesbary, Ranking Minority Member; Chambers, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Corry, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Berg, Chandler, Chopp, Connors, Couture, Davis, Dye, Fitzgibbon, Hansen, Harris, Lekanoff, Pollet, Riccelli, Rude, Ryu, Sandlin, Schmick, Senn, Simmons, Slatter, Springer, Steele, Stonier and Tharinger.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Staff: Jessica Van Horne (786-7288).

Background:

In 2021 the Legislature created the Law Enforcement Community Engagement Grant Project (Project) within the Department of Commerce (Commerce). The purpose of the Project is to foster community engagement through neighborhood organizing, law enforcement–community partnerships, youth mobilization, and business engagement. The Project includes 12 to 15 grant awards in counties that have demonstrated their commitment to programs that promote community engagement in public safety, including Spokane, Pierce, King, Okanogan, Yakima, Cowlitz, Clark, Chelan-Douglas, Walla Walla, Benton-Franklin, Grant, and Snohomish counties.

To be eligible for a grant through the Project, an applicant must: (1) be a public agency or nongovernmental organization; (2) have demonstrated experience with community engagement initiatives that impact public safety; (3) have community engagement; (4) have established or be willing to establish a coordinated effort with committed partners, which must include law enforcement and organizations committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion of community members; and (5) have established priorities, policies, and measurable goals in compliance with the requirements of the Project.

Grant recipients through the Project must conduct a variety of activities, including but not limited to:

- leading and facilitating neighborhood organizing initiatives;
- building substantive law enforcement–community partnerships;
- mobilizing youth to partner with neighborhood groups and law enforcement to prevent violence;
- engaging businesses to help prevent crimes; and
- collecting and reporting data and information as required by Commerce.

Commerce, in consultation with the Washington State Institute for Public Policy, developed reporting guidelines for grant recipients to measure whether the Project had an impact on crime rates and community engagement with, and perceptions of, law enforcement. A preliminary report was due to the Legislature by January 1, 2022, and a final report was due to the Legislature by December 1, 2023.

The Project expires on January 1, 2024.

Summary of Bill:

The expiration date for the Project is extended from January 1, 2024, to January 1, 2029. The Project is expanded from 12 to 15 grant awards in specified counties, to programs delivering services in a range of rural and urban counties across Washington. Certain

criteria for participants are changed to be disjunctive—"or," rather than "and." Commerce's reporting requirements are changed to require a report to the Legislature by December 1 of every odd-numbered year, with reporting to include details on the implementation and outcomes of the Project.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Law enforcement appreciates opportunities to have positive interactions between officers and members of the community. The grant project this bill would continue is a great example of a way to encourage community policing. The Project has gotten a great deal of national attention for its successful community-centered approach to strengthening relationships between law enforcement and communities, especially economically disadvantaged communities. Commerce has done a great job implementing the Project. The Legislature should help maintain this important program.

The Project demonstrates that Washington is forward-thinking and innovative in addressing community policing and building community trust. Many police reform efforts over the past several years have focused on improving trust, and the Project is doing the work by supporting many successful pilot programs that have strengthened relationships between communities and law enforcement, especially communities that are more likely to have contact with law enforcement or the criminal justice system. The Project allows cities, counties, and communities to work together and talk about solutions.

While extending the expiration date is supported, it would be better to remove the expiration date entirely. An amendment to return to the previous language around grant activities, which was not disjunctive, is also supported, as it would maintain the integrity of the program by keeping higher standards for grantees.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: James McMahan, Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs; Brian Spracklen, BlueBridge Alliance; Teresa Taylor, Washington Council of Police and Sheriffs; and Linda Thompson, Washington Association for Substance Misuse and Violence Prevention.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.