

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1899

As Reported by House Committee On:
Housing

Title: An act relating to the homelessness point-in-time count.

Brief Description: Concerning the homelessness point-in-time count.

Sponsors: Representatives Zahn, Thomas, Parshley, Simmons, Cortes, Ormsby, Hill and Macri.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Housing: 2/13/25, 2/18/25 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Makes changes related to the Washington homeless census and homelessness Point-in-Time Count requirements, including removing the requirement that a Washington homeless census be conducted annually.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 17 members: Representatives Peterson, Chair; Hill, Vice Chair; Richards, Vice Chair; Low, Ranking Minority Member; Jacobsen, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Manjarrez, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Barkis, Connors, Dufault, Engell, Entenman, Gregerson, Lekanoff, Reed, Thomas, Timmons and Zahn.

Staff: Audrey Vasek (786-7383).

Background:

The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires communities across the nation to collect data on their homeless populations and to report

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the data to the HUD in order to receive federal funds to support regional efforts to end homelessness. The data collection process is referred to as the Point-in-Time (PIT) Count. The PIT Count is an estimate of both sheltered and unsheltered populations experiencing homelessness on one night in the last 10 calendar days of January or at such other time as required by the HUD.

The sheltered homelessness count includes people who are staying in emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, or other temporary living arrangements on the night designated for the PIT Count. The unsheltered homelessness count includes people whose primary nighttime residence is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation on the night designated for the PIT Count, such as streets, cars, and parks.

The PIT Count is administered by continuums of care (CoCs), which are local planning bodies responsible for coordinating efforts to address homelessness in specific geographic areas. In Washington, there are six CoCs. Five of the CoCs represent major metropolitan areas including Clark, King, Pierce, Snohomish, and Spokane counties. The Balance of State CoC represents the rest of the state. The Department of Commerce (Commerce) leads data collection and reporting for all counties within the Balance of State CoC.

Under the HUD regulations, CoCs are required to plan and conduct, at least biennially, a PIT Count of persons experiencing homelessness within their geographic area. CoCs are also required to conduct a Housing Inventory Count (HIC) during the same time period as the PIT Count. The HIC is a point-in-time inventory of projects within a CoC that provide beds and units dedicated to serving persons who are homeless, such as emergency shelters, transitional housing, safe havens, and certain permanent housing.

Periodically, the HUD issues a notice (HUD Notice) that informs CoCs of the information that must be collected to successfully complete the HIC and PIT Count. For example, the 2024 HUD Notice, issued in November 2023, created additional requirements for the PIT Count, provided guidance on how to complete the HIC, described recent changes to the HIC and PIT Count requirements, and included simplified definitions of certain terms used for conducting the counts.

The PIT Count results are reported in the HUD Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR). The most recent AHAR was published in December 2024.

Under state law, Commerce is required to conduct an annual Washington homeless census for unsheltered persons that must be coordinated with already existing homeless census projects, including those funded by the HUD. Commerce also publishes a number of homelessness reports and data, including the annual PIT Count results and an annual report on homelessness.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The requirement that a Washington homeless census be conducted annually is removed. Instead, Commerce must conduct a Washington homeless census on a schedule created by Commerce and consistent with requirements in the statute related to the Washington Homeless Client Management Information System.

Language related to certain tasks that Commerce was required to complete by the end of year four after the statute was originally enacted in 2005 is removed. The language removed includes the requirement that Commerce implement an online information and referral system to enable local governments and providers to identify available housing for a homeless person, work with local governments and their providers to develop a capacity for continuous case management to assist homeless persons, and implement an organizational quality management system.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill removes all references to the HUD Notice and requirements that the data collected under the Washington homeless census be consistent with the HUD Notice. The substitute bill requires Commerce to conduct a Washington homeless census on a schedule created by Commerce and consistent with the Washington Homeless Client Management Information System requirements, instead of the HUD Notice requirements. The substitute bill also removes language added by the original bill that required the Washington homeless census to make every effort to count persons experiencing homelessness as defined by the HUD Notice.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 7, 2025.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This is a clean-up bill to make sure that state provisions better align with the federal requirements related to PIT Counts. Since 2006 Washington has been doing PIT Counts every single year. However, since the COVID-19 pandemic, the HUD has shifted from an annual to a biennial PIT Count. Now, the federal government only requires a PIT Count every other year. This bill removes an unnecessary mandate.

The state should not require more frequent PIT Counts than required by the federal government, especially when these counts may not really reflect how many people are

experiencing homelessness. During PIT Counts, volunteers walk around and try to figure out who is sleeping in their cars or tents, and it is not always easy to tell. The PIT Count can give wildly different results depending on the weather and the volunteer turnout.

This bill is a smart, commonsense step towards administrative efficiency and cost savings. This bill will allow counties to prioritize activities that deliver more services to unhoused populations and provide important administrative relief for county staff. Counties are responsible for creating local plans to address homelessness and for coordinating the PIT Counts. This coordination places a heavy administrative burden on county staff, particularly in small and mid-sized counties. Each year, one or two county staff in small and mid-sized counties must prioritize coordination of the PIT Count over the actual work of addressing homelessness. This bill will allow county governments to redirect this staff time towards helping people.

There are other ways besides PIT Counts to get data on homelessness. While PIT Counts made sense in the past, today more accurate data on homelessness and trends can be obtained from a combination of sources including Medicaid, Department of Social and Health Services, Commerce, and other sources. Every six months, Commerce publishes this data in what is called the snapshot of homelessness. This data set provides more reliable and comprehensive data than the PIT Count and does not create an extra burden for counties.

This bill does provide flexibility for local communities to continue doing an annual PIT Count if they want to.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Janice Zahn, prime sponsor; Curtis Steinhauer, Washington State Association of Counties; and Tedd Kelleher, Department of Commerce.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.