

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2401

As Reported by House Committee On:
State Government & Tribal Relations

Title: An act relating to establishing the boys and men commission.

Brief Description: Establishing the boys and men commission.

Sponsors: Representatives Berg, Stearns, Valdez, Leavitt, Parshley, Zahn, Richards, Scott, Paul, Ramel, Fey, Pollet, Macri, Nance, Reed, Timmons, Reeves, Bernbaum, Walen and Hall.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government & Tribal Relations: 1/23/26, 1/30/26 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Creates the Washington State Boys and Men Commission (Commission), contingent upon the receipt of nonstate contributions in an amount sufficient to fully fund the Commission's operational costs through December 31, 2029.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL RELATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Mena, Chair; Stearns, Vice Chair; Chase, Doglio and Farivar.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Waters, Ranking Minority Member; Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member.

Staff: Desiree Omli (786-7105).

Background:

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.

State law establishes a variety of agencies that focus on the needs of underrepresented populations and those with lived experience. Many of these agencies focus on areas of health, safety, education, economic well-being, and increased access to government services, with an overarching goal of removing systemic barriers that lower health outcomes and the well-being of Washingtonians.

Examples of these agencies are the:

- Commission on Hispanic Affairs, which aids in the development of public policy and the delivery of government services to the Hispanic community by identifying needs and defining issues, advising on policies, and establishing community and cross-sector relationships;
- Governor's Office of Indian Affairs, which promotes the government-to-government relationship between the State of Washington and Indian Tribes, advocates for the social and economic betterment of all American Indians and Alaska Natives living within Washington, and educates for a greater cultural understanding of the state's first citizens;
- LGBTQ Commission, which works to improve the state's interface with the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, two-spirit, and intersex community, identify the needs of its members, and ensure that there is an effective means of advocating for LGBTQ equity in all aspects of state government;
- Commission on African American Affairs, which advises the Governor and Legislature regarding policies that promote equal opportunity for African Americans.
- Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs, which seeks to improve the lives of Asian Pacific Americans in the state by ensuring their access to participation in the fields of government, business, education, and other areas;
- Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment, which advocates for the disability community to obtain equity in economic opportunity and community inclusion;
- Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs, which works to connect veterans and their family members to the benefits and services they earned through their military service, and to improve the quality of life for veterans and their families;
- Washington State Women's Commission, which works to ensure that state policies and programs reflect and respond to the real needs of women and girls, particularly those from historically excluded communities; and
- Office of Equity, which leads the statewide effort to embed equity and justice into the work of state agencies.

Summary of Bill:

The Washington State Boys and Men Commission (Commission) is established as a stand-alone agency, contingent upon the receipt of nonstate contributions in an amount sufficient to fully fund the Commission's operational costs through December 31, 2029. The Office of Financial Management (OFM) must, by June 30, 2026, determine the amount by fiscal

year that would be necessary to fully fund the operating costs of the Commission through December 31, 2029. The OFM must also seek nonstate contributions, place any contributions received into the newly created Boys and Men Commission Account, and notify interested parties whether sufficient funds have been received to fully cover the Commission's operational costs through December 31, 2029.

The Commission would consist of nine members appointed by the Governor. At least one member must be from a federally recognized Indian tribe. The Governor must consider nominations for membership based on maintaining a balanced and diverse distribution of ethnicity, geographic representation, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status, and occupational representation, but the majority of members must self-identify as male to maintain sufficient representation of individuals with direct lived experience. The Commission is administered by an executive director.

The Commission is responsible for:

- providing a clearinghouse for information regarding legislation relevant to the purpose of the Commission;
- identifying and defining specific needs of men and boys of color, those in rural locations, those who identify as LGBTQ, and those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged;
- consulting with state agencies regarding the effect of agency actions on the unique problems and needs of men and boys;
- advising agencies on the development and implementation of comprehensive and coordinated policies, plans, and programs that focus on the unique needs of men and boys;
- holding public hearings to gather input on issues relevant to its body of work;
- advocating for policies that increase the sense of belonging and decrease isolation and loneliness experienced by men and boys; and
- submitting a report every two years, beginning December 31, 2029, on the Commission's activities.

The Commission may solicit and receive grants, gifts, and endowments from public or private sources, and adopt rules as needed.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill contains multiple effective dates. Please see the bill.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) There are a growing set of problems harming boys and men and, in turn, the

families and communities of this state. Boys and men are falling behind in educational outcomes, where boys are more likely to struggle academically and disengage from school. The current one-size-fits-all educational model is failing boys. By requiring identical learning styles across all students, the education system inadvertently penalizes boys for a fundamental difference in male developmental needs. Boys and men also have a lower quality of health. Males face higher rates of suicide with four out of five youth suicides being boys and young men and where substance abuse disorder and untreated mental health conditions are on the rise. In the criminal legal system, men, and particularly men of color, are overrepresented. Men are also falling behind in workforce outcomes where many men are disconnected from stable employment opportunities. In the trades industry, the biggest danger to workers is not workplace injuries but rather personal struggles that surface when the workers go home. In 2023 there were 982 fatal job site injuries among construction workers across the country, but in that same year 15,910 construction workers died from an overdose and 5,095 died by suicide. The numbers tell a story of pain, isolation, and a lack of support. Young men need mentorship, they need affirmation, they need culturally responsive support, so that they also can grow and develop to their fullest potential. When boys are supported in school, have mentorship, and a true sense of belonging and purpose, it can change someone's life trajectory. Communities become safer and more stable, thereby reducing generational trauma that contributes to social challenges.

There is no single cause of, nor a single solution for, the problems facing boys and men. Creating this Commission would be a holistic approach to doing the careful, thoughtful work of bringing together research, people with lived experience, and cross-agency expertise to address pervasive crises facing boys and men in the state. The work of the Commission will inform the state's understanding of what is driving the trends in increasing feelings of loneliness and poor social and health outcomes.

This policy is not about centering men at the expense of women or rolling back hard-fought progress for anyone. Rather, it provides for a coordinated statewide approach to support boys and men and extends the same grace, intentionality, and investment into men and boys, particularly young men of color and young men who identify as LGBTQ, that the state has invested in girls and women. Men's health is family health, and improving men's health improves the economy. The state should aspire to cultivate a society where sex and gender are not predictors of poor life outcomes.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) This policy does not address a critical root cause impacting boys and men: fatherhood. Fatherlessness is a pressing problem. By failing to directly address this issue, the policy disenfranchises many boys, girls, mothers, grandmothers, and grandfathers in Washington. In addition, biological sex is not addressed in the bill. Focusing on biological sex is critical to understanding the root causes of challenges facing boys and men. Males of all races are behind their female counterparts in education and physical and mental health.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative April Berg, prime sponsor; Gerald Grubbs, Grapeview and Index School Districts; Kimber Erickson, Kellen CARES Foundation; Jose Romo Ramirez; Richard Pelman, Washington State Urology Society; Alex Craighead, Journeymen Institute; Paula Fillmore-Sardinas, WBBA—WA Build Back Black Alliance; Heather Kurtenbach, Washington State Building & Construction Trades Council; Jen Shevitz, Let Me Run; Richard Reeves, American Institute for Boys and Men; Billy Hetherington, Laborers Local Union 242; Blair Daly, Washington Initiative for Boys and Men; Joe Cook, Washington Initiative for Boys and Men; Jeffrey Evans, Washington State Urology Society; Simon Thornton; and Evan Wagoner-Lynch.

(Other) Sean Kullman, Global Initiative for Boys and Men.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.