

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2435

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

Title: An act relating to creating the legislative office on Indian affairs.

Brief Description: Creating the legislative office on Indian affairs.

Sponsors: Representatives Lekanoff, Parshley, Ryu, Scott, Salahuddin, Peterson, Obras, Pollet, Santos, Macri and Hill.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government & Tribal Relations: 1/20/26, 1/27/26 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Creates the Legislative Office on Indian Affairs as an agency of the legislative branch.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL RELATIONS

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

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

Staff: Desiree Omli (786-7105).

Background:

Tribal Relations—Executive Branch.

The Governor’s Office of Indian Affairs (GOIA) is housed within the executive branch and

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.

promotes the government-to-government relationship between the state and Indian tribes. The GOIA serves as liaison between state and tribal governments in an advisory, resource, consultation, and educational capacity. Each state agency is required to identify a tribal liaison responsible for assisting with agency development and implementation of state and agency policies that promote effective communication and collaboration between the state agency and tribal governments; serving as a contact person with tribal governments and maintaining communication between the state agency and affected tribal governments; and coordinating training of state agency employees in government-to-government relations.

Tribal Relations—Judicial Branch.

The Tribal State Court Consortium (TSCC) is a joint effort between state and tribal court judicial officers and other judicial branch members to expand communication and collaboration on issues concerning domestic violence and sexual assault, dependency cases involving Indian children, and the disproportionate number of Indian youth in the juvenile justice system. The TSCC provides a forum where state and tribal court judicial officers can discuss jurisdictional issues, gaps in services, and ways to develop partnerships.

Summary of Bill:

Tribal Relations—Legislative Branch.

The Legislative Office on Indian Affairs (Office) is created as an agency of the legislative branch to provide informational resources relating to tribal affairs to legislators and professional legislative staff. Professional legislative staff includes individuals whose primary responsibilities require the exercise of judgment and discretion in policy-related matters including individuals who are involved in the development of legislation. The Executive Director of the Office is employed by the Chief Clerk of the House of Representatives and the Secretary of the Senate, in consultation with the Senate Facilities and Operations Committee and the House Executive Rules Committee.

The Office is responsible for providing educational and informational resources to legislators and the professional legislative staff of both chambers and the Office of the Code Revisor. Such resources include:

- annual training on specified topics including cultural awareness and understanding of the state's tribal members, tribal sovereignty, the appropriate use of shared definitions and terminology, legal issues impacting the government-to-government relationship, and best practices for policymaking when dealing with policies that have the potential to impact tribal policies;
- continuing education training as needed on tribal policy and issues of mutual concern;
- assistance in locating educational and informational resources relating to tribal affairs and tribal organizations; and
- expertise on the Centennial Accord, Millennium Agreement, and the government-to-government relationship.

The annual training is mandatory for professional legislative staff, and legislators are encouraged to attend.

The Office must coordinate with the Statute Law Committee to include in any bill drafting guide the best practices for drafting policy relating to tribes and the appropriate use of shared definitions and terminology.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Washington has an outstanding record in establishing a relationship between the state and tribal nations through the Centennial Accord. The Centennial Accord, however, is an agreement between the executive branch and the federally recognized tribes of Washington. The Millennium Agreement, adopted after the Centennial Accord, renewed the principles of the Centennial Accord and also encouraged the Legislature to establish a structure to address issues of mutual concern to the state and tribes. This bill provides resources for legislators to be informed and educated decision makers on issues of mutual concern such as economic development and school systems. This is a way to also strengthen partnership as coprotectors of natural resources and comanagers of salmon.

The creation of this office would also be helpful to legislative staff who conduct the research and provide written language for policies and law. The training and other educational resources provided by the office will be beneficial to not only legislators but to staff of the Legislature.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Debra Lekanoff, prime sponsor.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.