

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 1899

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Housing, March 21, 2025

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

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

Sponsors: House Committee on Housing (originally sponsored by Representatives Zahn, Thomas, Parshley, Simmons, Cortes, Ormsby, Hill and Macri).

Brief History: Passed House: 3/4/25, 95-0.

Committee Activity: Housing: 3/19/25, 3/21/25 [DP, w/oRec].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Makes changes related to the Washington homeless census or count requirements.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Bateman, Chair; Alvarado, Vice Chair; Orwall, Salomon and Trudeau.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senators Goehner, Ranking Member; Gildon.

Staff: Melissa Van Gorkom (786-7491)

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

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.

The PIT Count is an estimate of both sheltered and unsheltered populations experiencing homelessness on one night in the last ten 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. 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.

Under state law, the Department of Commerce (Commerce) is required to conduct an annual Washington homeless census or count consistent with the Homeless Client Management Information System (HMIS) requirements that must be coordinated with already existing homeless census projects, including those funded by the HUD. Commerce, in consultation with local governments, determines the data CoCs will collect and input it into the HMIS to get accurate counts of homeless clients. Commerce must make the summary of data by county available to the public each year and include the data, and its analysis, in the annual update on the state's homeless housing strategic plan.

Summary of 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.

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.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: It's hard to have accuracy in

data—measuring for people sleeping outside in January. The HUD changed requirements from every year to every two years and this allows Commerce to make sure we're identifying the best way to measure and count the people experiencing homelessness in Washington State, while also complying with the HUD requirements of at least every other year. This coordination creates a heavy administrative burden on county staff who are responsible for coordinating the PIT count in their communities. Particularly in small and mid-sized counties, where each year, the one or two county staff-people working in housing programs have to prioritize coordination of the count over the actual work of addressing homelessness.

The PIT count is no longer our primary source of data on the number of people experiencing homelessness and trends. Instead, we have better, more accurate data, derived from multiple cross match, state, and local data systems. The resulting information is published on the Commerce website every six months. This bill is a smart, common sense, step towards administrative efficiency and cost savings. This will free up county staff to prioritize activities to deliver more services to the unhoused population and actually help move people inside.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Janice Zahn, Prime Sponsor; Curtis Steinhauer, Washington State Association of Counties; Tedd Kelleher, Department of Commerce.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.