

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 6122

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As Reported By Senate Committee On:  
Health & Long-Term Care, February 28, 2007

**Title:** An act relating to establishing the regional centers for Washington individuals with autism program.

**Brief Description:** Establishing the regional centers for Washington individuals with autism program.

**Sponsors:** Senators Rasmussen, Delvin, Zarelli, Fairley, Prentice, Rockefeller, Honeyford, Oemig, Hatfield, Regala, Keiser, Parlette, Brandland, Brown, McAuliffe, Shin, Hargrove, Marr, Eide, Clements, Holmquist, Hobbs, Kauffman, Spanel, Kilmer, Pridemore, Kohl-Welles, Weinstein and Roach.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Health & Long-Term Care: 2/26/07, 2/28/07 [DP-WM].

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

**Majority Report:** Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Keiser, Chair; Franklin, Vice Chair; Pflug, Ranking Minority Member; Carrell, Fairley, Kastama, Kohl-Welles, Marr and Parlette.

**Staff:** Edith Rice (786-7444)

**Background:** Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental disorder that affects a person's ability to communicate and relate to others. There is a wide variability in ASD symptoms and severity. IQs range from superior to severely mentally retarded. Twenty-five percent of people with ASD do not develop speech.

ASD affects as many as one in 166 children nationally. In Washington, the rate is similar, estimated to be between two and six children per 1,000. ASD is as common as juvenile diabetes, and more common than childhood cancer, Down Syndrome, deafness, or cystic fibrosis. The Caring for Washington Individuals with Autism Task Force was created by the passage of SB 5311 in 2005 to address the growing concerns about ASD in our state. The goal of the task force is to ensure that people with ASD are included in their communities and receive appropriate, timely, and legally required services throughout their life. Regardless of age, race, ethnicity, and geography, an individual with ASD needs individualized, evidence-based, culturally effective, multidisciplinary interventions, comprehensive health care, and community inclusion.

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The task force issued a report and identified four areas where significant change needs to be made: infrastructure, treatment, training, and funding. In all, the task force developed 31 recommendations within these categories. The following six recommendations are considered by the task force to be essential first steps to improve the system of care for individuals with ASD:

- Create regional autism centers of excellence in targeted areas of the state.
- Increase Washington's capacity to identify and track people with ASD and the services they receive across their lifespan.
- Screen all Washington children for ASD before the age of three years, ideally by 18 months.
- Establish a minimum of one trained autism technical assistance specialist in each of the nine Educational Service Districts to provide support to teachers and staff.
- Ensure that state agencies already required to provide services to people with ASD will have in place staff training on ASD and ASD supports.
- Create an autism services guidebook which includes information and resources from birth through the lifespan.

Some of the task force recommendations will require long term systems changes. These changes include greatly increased access to comprehensive health care in a medical home, ongoing training of all types of professionals who work with individuals with ASD, fully funded and culturally effective provider and family support services, and full funding of regular and special education. Such systems improvements are essential and will benefit not only individuals with ASD, but all people with disabilities.

**Summary of Bill:** The Department of Health (DOH) will establish the regional centers for Washington individuals with autism program in targeted areas of the state. DOH will confer with the Caring for Washington Individuals with Autism Task Force and create and expand regional centers in eastern and western Washington. These regional centers will work with existing programs to train allied health professionals, provide technical assistance, provide support, promote independence, inclusion and community integration. Regional centers will develop a consortia of care to minimize duplication of services.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on February 23, 2007.

**Committee/Commission/Task Force Created:** No.

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

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: We have the usual backlog of individuals waiting for diagnosis. Regional resources will be critical in providing services. We need to reach other areas of the state and get local input. We need this to happen this year. We support expansion of existing supports.

CON: Regional center is not defined in this bill, and it sounds like it duplicates the existing underfunded system.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator Rasmussen, prime sponsor; Erin Lynch, Monica Meyer, Carol Taylor, Autism Outreach; Hanna Sheffield, Autism Community Services.

CON: Sue Elliott, Advocates for the Rights of Citizens with Developmental Disabilities of Washington; Donna Patrick, Developmental Disabilities Council.