

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## SSB 6377

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*As Reported By House Committee on:  
Energy & Utilities*

**Title:** An act relating to the TDD state-wide relay system.

**Brief Description:** Modifying provisions for the awarding of TDD distribution and maintenance contracts.

**Sponsor(s):** Senate Committee on Energy & Utilities  
(originally sponsored by Senator Thorsness).

**Brief History:**

Reported by House Committee on:  
Energy & Utilities, February 27, 1992, DPA.

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**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON  
ENERGY & UTILITIES**

**Majority Report:** *Do pass as amended.* Signed by 11 members: Representatives Grant, Chair; H. Myers, Vice Chair; May, Ranking Minority Member; Hochstatter, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bray; Casada; Cooper; R. Fisher; Jacobsen; Miller; and Rayburn.

**Staff:** Fred Adair (786-7113).

**Background:**

In 1987, the Legislature enacted a program to distribute state-owned devices to the hearing-impaired community that allow these citizens to communicate through the telecommunications network. These devices are referred to as "Telecommunications Devices for the Deaf" or "TDDs," and include a range of equipment such as simple amplifiers, machines with a keyboard that also provides text readout, and machines for citizens who are both deaf and blind.

This program also authorized a statewide relay system for hearing-impaired to communicate with the hearing community, through a group of third-party interpreters. This system became operational in November 1989.

The Legislature reauthorized this program in 1990 and extended it to the speech-impaired. Later in 1990, Congress enacted and the president signed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a measure that required all states

to eventually develop relay services similar to the Washington program. Also, the federal act was emphatic in changing some of the nomenclature associated with the TDD Program. Notably, TDDs are "Text Telephones (TTs)" and the TDD Program is the "Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS)" Program.

Federal requirements for these relay systems, both in the ADA and in directives from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), affect the future of the established relay system in Washington. In response to this uncertainty, in 1991 the Legislature created a task force to provide recommendations on the future of the TRS Program. The task force reported to the Legislature in December 1991, with nine specific recommendations.

***Summary of Amended Bill:***

The Office of Deaf Services within the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) shall seek certification by the FCC of the statewide relay service for the hearing-impaired and speech-impaired. DSHS shall award contracts for the operation and maintenance of the relay service for service commencing July 26, 1993. Any entity awarded the contract must be registered as a telecommunications company by the Utilities and Transportation Commission prior to final contract approval.

When considering contracts for TRS equipment, DSHS may consider the quality of equipment and award contracts on a basis other than cost.

The Utilities and Transportation Commission (UTC) shall determine the TRS excise tax by using the budget submitted by DSHS and dividing it by the number of telephone access lines. The TRS excise tax ceiling is 14 cents per month per access line.

The TRS Program Advisory Committee shall report at least four times per year to the administrators and operators of the statewide relay service on the effectiveness of the program.

Each telecommunications company providing intrastate interexchange voice transmission service shall offer discounts for service used in conjunction with the relay service.

***Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill:*** Nomenclature in the program is changed to conform to ADA terminology. The TRS excise tax ceiling is raised from 10 to 14 cents.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

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

**Testimony For:** Washington is in the forefront in the TRS (TDD) Program. ADA requires action to keep this as a state-directed program and the state should keep direction of the program because it is one of the best. One testifier urged that the excise tax ceiling be kept at 10 cents.

**Testimony Against:** None.

**Witnesses:** Mike Burns, Washington State Association of the Deaf (pro); Lori Breslow, DSHS (TRS Program Coordinator)(pro); and Bob Bratton, GTE (pro).