

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5284

AS REPORTED BY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, MARCH 6, 1991

Brief Description: Providing opportunities for instruction in braille.

SPONSORS: Senator L. Smith.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5284 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Bailey, Chairman; Erwin, Vice Chairman; Anderson, Craswell, Metcalf, and Oke.

Staff: Leslie Goldstein (786-7424)

Hearing Dates: March 5, 1991; March 6, 1991

BACKGROUND:

The federal Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 requires that states accepting federal funds provide a free and appropriate public education for all handicapped children in the least restrictive environment. The federal law requires that related services needed to assist a handicapped child to benefit from special education be provided. Handicapped children in Washington must have the opportunity for an appropriate education as provided in the Education for All Act and guaranteed by the Constitution of this state. Instruction in braille is not provided for visually impaired or blind students unless specifically required in the student's individual education plan.

SUMMARY:

Each school district in the state and the Washington State School for the Blind are required to provide the opportunity to receive instruction in braille to blind students attending school within the district. A blind student is defined as including a student that has certain specified vision impairments.

Certificated instructional staff qualified to provide special education services who are instructing blind students in reading or writing are required to demonstrate competency in braille within two years after the effective date of this act. Competency in braille may be demonstrated by written proof of successful completion of: 1) the course in literary braille for braille transcribers administered by the United States Library of Congress; 2) any test created or endorsed by the United States Library of Congress to certify proficiency of educational personnel in braille; 3) a course for braille

transcribers administered by the Washington State Regional Library for the Blind; or 4) a course approved by the State Board of Education equivalent to any of the described courses.

EFFECT OF PROPOSED SUBSTITUTE:

School districts are urged to increase their efforts to provide the opportunity to receive instruction in braille. Services are not mandated.

If the school district does not provide instruction in braille, the school district is required to submit a written report to the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Teachers are required to work toward developing competency in braille, but may still teach while developing that competency.

Appropriation: none

Revenue: none

Fiscal Note: requested February 21, 1991

TESTIMONY FOR:

Students who are blind or who have some residual vision cannot read because they are not being taught braille. Technology is not a substitute for the written word. By not teaching braille, illiteracy is fostered among the blind. Illiteracy is costly. Teachers providing reading and writing instruction to blind students must be competent in braille.

TESTIMONY AGAINST: None

TESTIFIED: PRO: Representative Sarah Casada; Kelley Martin, parent; Stuart Martin, parent; Dana Warren, vision consultant; Michael Freeman, National Assn. to Promote the Use of Braille