

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5593

AS REPORTED BY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, MARCH 6, 1991

Brief Description: Revising provisions for private schools.

SPONSORS: Senators Craswell, Rasmussen, Bailey, Conner, Metcalf, Anderson, Stratton, Oke, Erwin, L. Smith and McCaslin.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass.

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

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senators Murray, Pelz, Rinehart, A. Smith, and Talmadge.

Staff: Leslie Goldstein (786-7424)

Hearing Dates: March 4, 1991; March 6, 1991

BACKGROUND:

Private schools are required to file an annual statement with the Superintendent of Public Instruction certifying that specific minimum standards are met to qualify as an approved private school.

Minimum requirements for approval include: a 180 day school year or its equivalent in annual program hour offerings; basic education program hour offerings according to state level; state certification of classroom teachers except teachers of religious courses or teachers of unusual competence supervised by certificated teachers; guarding permanent records against loss or damage; adequate physical facilities to meet health and fire safety requirements; sufficient units of instruction to meet high school graduation requirements; and maintaining policy statements on school administration and operation.

The compulsory school attendance law requires parents to assure that their children attend public school in the district in which the child resides unless: the child is attending an approved private school or an extension program of such school; the child is receiving home-based instruction; or the superintendent of the district has excused the child due to a handicapping condition or because he or she is over the age of 15 and has met graduation requirements; or for other reasons is permitted to leave school.

A number of churches operate educational programs as one aspect of ministry to the families served by the ministry. The operators of some of these schools object to the approval

process based upon their firm belief that state regulation is an infringement of religious liberty guaranteed by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

SUMMARY:

"Approved private school" is defined as a state-approved private school or a church-approved private school. "Church-approved private school" is defined as an integral and inseparable part of a church ministry, offering a structured program of academic instruction approved by the governing body of the sponsoring church.

All references to "private school" in the private school approval law are changed to "state-approved private school." Only those schools which are state-approved are subject to the statutory requirements for the approval of private schools.

Appropriation: none

Revenue: none

Fiscal Note: none requested

TESTIMONY FOR:

Church-sponsored schools provide valuable educational services and are regulated by the church ministry. This legislation will recognize the uniqueness of these Christian schools and help accommodate the faith. The bill requires no appropriation or revenue.

TESTIMONY AGAINST: None

TESTIFIED: PRO: Thomas Minnick, Washington State Coalition for Religious Liberty; James Brambler, Washington Baptist College of Biblical Education; Dr. Dennis W. Mills, Association of Christian Church Schools; CON: Judy Hartmann, Washington Education Association (time did not permit actual testimony)