

FINAL BILL REPORT

SSB 6377

C 144 L 92

SYNOPSIS AS ENACTED

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

SPONSORS: Senate Committee on Energy & Utilities (originally sponsored by Senator Thorsness)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY & UTILITIES

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY & UTILITIES

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 keyboards that also provide text readout known as "text telephones" (TTs), 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.

Federal requirements for these relay systems, both in the ADA and in directives from the Federal Communications Commission, 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 relay service. The task force reported to the Legislature in December, 1991, with nine specific recommendations on the future of the relay system.

SUMMARY:

The Office of Deaf Services within the Department of Social and Health Services shall seek certification by the Federal Communications Commission of the statewide relay service for the hearing-impaired and speech-impaired. The service will be known as the Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS). The

Office of Deaf Services (the office) shall award contracts for the operation and maintenance of the TRS for service commencing July 26, 1993. Any entity awarded the contract must be registered as telecommunications company by the Utilities and Transportation Commission prior to final contract approval.

When considering contracts for equipment used for hearing-impaired and speech-impaired communications, the office may consider the quality of equipment and award contracts on a basis other than cost.

The Utilities and Transportation Commission shall provide specific data to the office on the number of access lines in the state for the use of the office in determining the rate of the TRS excise tax.

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.

VOTES ON FINAL PASSAGE:

Senate	43	0	
House	98	0	(House amended)
Senate	46	0	(Senate concurred)

EFFECTIVE: June 11, 1992