

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2638

As Reported By House Committee On:
Corrections

Title: An act relating to juvenile offenders.

Brief Description: Requiring juvenile offenders to be assessed for the possible effects of fetal alcohol syndrome.

Sponsors: Representatives Karahalios, Leonard, Cooke, Thibaudeau, Morris, Flemming and Long.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Corrections, February 2, 1994, DP.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CORRECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Morris, Chair; Mastin, Vice Chair; Long, Ranking Minority Member; Edmondson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; G. Cole; L. Johnson; Moak and Ogden.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Padden.

Staff: Antonio Sanchez (786-7383).

Background: Heavy alcohol consumption during pregnancy is known to cause alcohol-related defects among infants. Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) is characterized by growth retardation, facial malformations, and central nervous system dysfunction including mental retardation. Fetal alcohol effect (FAE) is less severe and less easily recognizable, but is characterized by lower intelligence and development problems in children.

Currently, no data reporting system has been established that consistently collects and reports information on the incidence of FAS or FAE. However, national legislation enacted in 1989 required state health departments to begin annual reporting on the incidence of FAS as part of their responsibilities under the Maternal and Child Health Block Grant.

While no current state-level data is available, national estimates are that one out of every 750 newborns suffers

from FAS and one out of every 200 suffers from FAE. In Washington State this would translate to over 130 FAS babies and over 400 FAE babies born this year.

A recent survey of the Department of Juvenile Rehabilitation population documented a significant mental health problem. The problems range from the classic symptoms of psychosis (4 percent) to immediate threat of suicide (14 percent).

The Department of Social and Health Services currently does not specifically assess juvenile offenders committed to their custody to determine if they have FAS or FAE. In addition, no specific programs are offered to these juvenile offenders. Echo Glen Children's Center currently houses mentally ill offenders and a high number of youth with special education needs.

Summary of Bill: The Department of Social and Health Services is required to assess all juvenile offenders in their confinement to determine if the juvenile offender has fetal alcohol syndrome or fetal alcohol effect. The department is also required to provide available and appropriate services for these offenders.

Fiscal Note: Requested January 28, 1994.

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

Testimony For: This bill identifies individuals that need additional assistance due to their disability. These programs will in turn help rehabilitate them and prepare them for a useful life in the community.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: Representative Karahalios, prime sponsor (pro); and Christy Hedman, Washington Defenders Association (pro).