

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HCR 4406

As Reported By House Committee On:
State Government

Brief Description: Creating a Joint Legislative Task Force on Educational Equity.

Sponsors: Representatives J. Kohl, Jacobsen, Dorn, Kessler, Flemming, Wood, Shin, Basich, Ogden, Quall, Peery, G. Cole, Brough, Franklin, Thibaudeau, Brown, Veloria, Johanson, Romero, Miller and Wineberry.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
State Government, March 1, 1993, DPS.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Anderson, Chair; Veloria, Vice Chair; Reams, Ranking Minority Member; Campbell; Conway; Dyer; King; and Pruitt.

Staff: Bonnie Austin (786-7135).

Background: Article IX, Section 1, of the Washington State Constitution, specifically prohibits discrimination in education on the basis of race, color, caste, or sex. Various state and federal laws prohibit both public schools and higher educational institutions from discriminating in employment, counseling services, recreational and athletic activities, admissions, tuition, fees, financial aid, housing, and access to course offerings and facilities.

Summary of Substitute Bill: A Joint Legislative Task Force on Educational Equity is established. The task force will consist of up to 25 members, including: Eight members of the Legislature, including members of the House and Senate Education and Higher Education committees; one member each from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the state Board of Education, the Higher Education Coordinating Board, the state Board for Community and Technical Colleges, and the Human Rights Commission; and 10 public members representing students, faculty, parents, administrators, and employees.

The task force is directed to: (1) Identify laws that prohibit discrimination in public education; (2) analyze remedies available to victims of discrimination; (3) determine to what extent existing provisions overlap; (4) identify needed laws or programs, fiscal impacts and potential effects; (5) examine enforcement responsibilities; and (6) prepare a synopsis of this information to assist public schools and higher education institutions.

By December 31, 1994, the chair and vice-chair will report to the Legislature the committee's findings and recommendations for changes in statutes, rules, programs, and ways to improve coordination of existing efforts to prevent or redress discrimination. The task force will expire December 31, 1994.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The expiration date of the task force is changed from July 1, 1994, to December 31, 1994.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Testimony For: The various groups discussed in the bill have been meeting since prior to the end of 1992 to develop a nondiscrimination-in-education bill. This is a monumental effort that needs more time. There are gaps in existing statutes and an omnibus bill may be needed to fill these gaps. Gender discrimination is fairly well covered by current law, but gaps exist in the areas of bilingual education, and discrimination based on disabilities, sexual orientation, economic status, race, national origin and ethnicity. The Human Rights Commission is willing to participate if their funding permits. Students, especially girls, are facing increasing sexual harassment in schools from their male peers. This type of harassment is intimidating, yet it is often dismissed by school personnel as harmless. This is another gap that needs to be addressed.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: Representative Jeanne Kohl, prime sponsor (pro); Refernell Thompson, Human Rights Commission (pro); and Jo Herber, American Association of University Women (pro).