

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2429

As Reported By House Committee On:
Human Services

Title: An act relating to funerals.

Brief Description: Concerning funeral expenses for indigent persons.

Sponsors: Representatives Karahalios, Johanson and Wineberry.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Human Services, February 3, 1994, DPS.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Leonard, Chair; Thibaudeau, Vice Chair; Cooke, Ranking Minority Member; Talcott, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Brown; Caver; Karahalios; Lisk; Padden; Patterson and Wolfe.

Staff: John Welsh (786-7133).

Background: Prior to the 1993-95 state biennial budget, the state assumed responsibility for the preparation, care and disposition of the remains of a decedent whose assets did not include sufficient resources to pay for a minimum funeral and interment, after considering the assets of surviving spouses, parents and children.

The current budget eliminated this program, though the legal authority was not repealed. The maximum assistance available was \$1,127, which included \$691 for preparation and funeral services, and \$436 for burial and purchase of plot. According to the budget notes, the elimination of funding of the funeral assistance program would bring a biennial savings to the income assistance budget of \$6.4 million, and to the Community Services Administration budget of \$580,000.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The Department of Social and Health Services is to review and make recommendations by December 31, 1994 to determine the feasibility of assuming responsibility for the payment of funeral expenses for indigent persons. In the review, the department is to

consult specified organizations of interest such as the funeral professions.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The reference to "study" was deleted in favor of "review and make recommendations," and the department is required to consult the various provider organizations in reviewing the question.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: The repeal of state funeral assistance for indigents in the current budget may be working hardships on family survivors and counties which are required to pay for the funerals and burials of unclaimed bodies. The funeral industry must absorb the difference. The question should be reviewed by the department with recommendations submitted to policy makers on an assessment of the problem.

Testimony Against: The funeral directors and embalmers do not mind absorbing funeral costs for those who cannot pay, and funeral providers are being adequately compensated by family survivors.

Witnesses: James H. Noel, Washington State Funeral Directors Association (con); Lola Franklin, Washington State Funeral Directors Association (con); Judy Arnold, Thurston County Coroner (pro); Barbara Anderson, Island County Coroner (pro); Bernice Morehead, Department of Social and Health Services (pro); and Paul Elvig, Washington Cemetery Association.