

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2631

As Reported By House Committee On:
State Government

Title: An act relating to the office of state information operators.

Brief Description: Creating an office of state information operators.

Sponsors: Representative Anderson.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
State Government, February 2, 1994, DPS.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Anderson, Chair; Veloria, Vice Chair; Reams, Ranking Minority Member; L. Thomas, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Campbell; Conway; Dyer; King and Pruitt.

Staff: Bonnie Austin (786-7135).

Background: A general public toll-free telephone line for state government is currently administered by the Department of Information Services (DIS). Previously, the toll-free line offered both state government referral, directory assistance and telephone transfer services. However, in the past year DIS has been forced to reduce its staff from approximately 520 full-time employees (FTE's) to approximately 420 FTE's. The number of operators who provide telephone services has been reduced from 10 FTE's to four temporary employees. Telephone transfer services are no longer provided. Additionally, the toll-free telephone line is scheduled to be eliminated on June 30, 1994.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The Office of State Information Operators is permanently established in the Department of Information Services (DIS). The office will provide both a toll-free telephone number and operator service staff. The staff will direct public calls to the appropriate state agency and will provide the public with telephone transfer services to state agencies. State agencies are required to

participate in the telephone transfer program and reimburse the office for services rendered.

The director of DIS will adopt rules to fix the terms and charges for the services rendered by the office. Charges will be made to each agency's operations appropriation and credited to the data processing revolving fund. If the Legislature chooses to participate in the call transfer program, the director is authorized to bill the Legislature for services rendered.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The telephone line provided for the public will be toll-free. State agencies are required to participate in the call transfer program and reimburse the office for services rendered. If the Legislature chooses to participate in the call transfer program, the director is authorized to bill the Legislature.

Fiscal Note: Requested January 25, 1994.

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

Testimony For: This program is critical for maintaining public access to government. DIS was forced into a difficult decision on this one, but kept the service going on a minimal basis until the Legislature could act. We need operators as opposed to a digital computer system because often questions need to be asked to get to the core of the caller's concern. Callers from rural areas still have rotary phones that can't access a digital system. Also, some operators are able to provide bi-lingual services. These operators really know state government and get callers to the appropriate agency.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: Sam Hunt, Department of Information Services (pro); Bev Hermanson, Washington Federation of State Employees (pro); Tim Welch, Washington Federation of State Employees (pro); and Gail Kittleman, Department of Information Services Operator (pro).