

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 1945

AS REPORTED BY COMMITTEE ON LAW & JUSTICE, FEBRUARY 24, 1994

Brief Description: Authorizing courts to order parenting seminars in family court actions.

SPONSORS: House Committee on Judiciary (originally sponsored by Representative Romero)

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

SENATE COMMITTEE ON LAW & JUSTICE

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators A. Smith, Chairman; Ludwig, Vice Chairman; Hargrove, Nelson, Roach and Schow.

Staff: Susan Carlson (786-7418)

Hearing Dates: February 23, 1994; February 24, 1994

BACKGROUND:

Family law judges and court commissioners may order or recommend family court services, drug and alcohol abuse evaluations and monitoring of parties in a divorce or other domestic action through public or private treatment services. They may also order the parties to see physicians, psychiatrists, other specialists, or obtain "other services." The statute authorizing the court to order family court services does not expressly provide that courts may order parents to attend parenting seminars. Some courts order parents to attend parenting seminars on a case-by-case basis, and other courts have adopted court rules which require parents in all actions to attend seminars. Some concern has been expressed that the courts do not have the power to adopt court rules requiring parents to attend parenting seminars in all cases.

The parties bear the cost of all or a portion of the family court services according to the parties' ability to pay.

SUMMARY:

Family law judges and court commissioners are expressly authorized to order parents to attend parenting seminars. If court rules are adopted to implement parenting seminars, the rules must include certain provisions. The rules may not require opposing parties to attend seminars together; the court may waive the seminar for good cause; and, upon a showing of domestic violence or abuse or that attending the seminar is not in the children's best interests, the court

must either waive the requirement or provide an alternative, voluntary parenting seminar for battered spouses.

Parties will pay for all or a portion of the cost of the parenting seminars based on the parties' ability to pay.

Appropriation: none

Revenue: none

Fiscal Note: requested February 15, 1994

TESTIMONY FOR:

Parenting seminars are beneficial in divorce cases because they teach parents how to help their children with the changes and stress caused by the divorce. The bill alleviates concerns that have been raised as to whether courts have the authority to require parenting seminars.

TESTIMONY AGAINST:

Parenting seminars may not be appropriate in cases involving domestic violence. Small communities may not have more than one seminar and both parties would have to attend the same seminar.

TESTIFIED: PRO: Representative Romero, prime sponsor; Judge James H. Allendoerfer, Snohomish County Superior Court; Ruth Schweinfurth, Barbara Rofkar, Whatcom Dispute Resolution Center; CON: Mary Pontarolo, WA State Coalition Against Domestic Violence; Elizabeth McNagny