

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 6401

AS PASSED SENATE, FEBRUARY 11, 1994

Brief Description: Requiring an environmental equity report.

SPONSORS: Senate Committee on Ecology & Parks (originally sponsored by Senators Franklin, Winsley, Prentice, Rinehart, Pelz, Talmadge, Moore, Drew, Fraser, Moyer, Wojahn and Williams)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ECOLOGY & PARKS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6401 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Fraser, Chairman; Deccio, Moore, Morton, Sutherland and Talmadge.

Staff: Cathy Baker (786-7708)

Hearing Dates: February 2, 1994; February 4, 1994

BACKGROUND:

Environmental equity refers to the distribution of environmental risks across population groups. There is a concern that some communities, particularly low-income and racial minority communities, may bear a higher environmental risk burden than the general population.

Environmental equity issues have been a growing concern in other states and at the federal level. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has begun an administrative effort to address whether current programs and policies contribute to an inequitable distribution of environmental risks. A number of other states are considering legislation addressing this issue.

It is suggested a study is needed in order to determine whether such inequities exist in Washington State.

SUMMARY:

By June 30, 1995, the Department of Ecology and the Department of Health are to jointly prepare a report to the Legislature providing information on the distribution of environmental risks in relation to minority and low-income communities.

The report shall include demographic information; a survey of the location of environmental facilities; and a list of census tracts ranked in order of the amount of toxic chemicals released each year. For the purposes of the study, the 50 census tracts with the highest toxic releases shall be considered "environmental high impact areas."

The report is also to include recommendations on further studies that are needed or actions that could be taken to address environmental equity concerns.

The study does not apply to environmental facilities or toxic substance releases associated with agricultural operations.

Appropriation: none

Revenue: none

Fiscal note: available

TESTIMONY FOR:

The bill addresses a timely and relevant issue. The study authorized is an important first step in addressing the problem of low income communities and racial minorities being disproportionately burdened by hazardous and solid waste sites.

TESTIMONY AGAINST: None

TESTIFIED: Senator Rosa Franklin, prime sponsor; Naki Stevens, Community Coalition For Environmental Justice (pro); Tom Eaton, Department of Ecology (pro); Carl Sagerser, Department of Health (pro)