

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 1560

As Passed Legislature

Title: An act relating to the state toxicology laboratory.

Brief Description: Enabling the bureau of forensic laboratory services.

Sponsors: By House Committee on State Government (Originally sponsored by Representatives McMorris, Scott, Ballasiotes, Mitchell, Romero, Dickerson, McDonald, Poulsen, Bush, Constantine, Fortunato and Murray; by request of Forensic Investigation Council).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government: 2/12/99, 2/24/99 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/5/99, 97-0.

Passed Senate: 4/7/99, 48-0.

Passed Legislature.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- The State Toxicology Lab is transferred to the State Patrol.
- The State Toxicology Lab and the State Crime Lab are combined under the Bureau of Forensic Laboratory Services within the State Patrol.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives McMorris, Republican Co-Chair; Romero, Democratic Co-Chair; Campbell, Republican Vice Chair; Miloscia, Democratic Vice Chair; Dunshee; Haigh; Lambert and D. Schmidt.

Staff: Scott MacColl (786-7106).

Background:

The State Toxicology Lab was established in conjunction with the University of Washington Medical School, and performs all necessary toxicological procedures requested by all coroners, medical examiners, and prosecuting attorneys. The lab is currently funded by disbursements from full service restaurant, full service private club, and sports club entertainment facility license fees. The crime lab provides laboratory services to analyze and scientifically handle any physical evidence related to any crime.

The Forensic Investigations Council is actively involved in oversight and preparation of the budgets of both the crime lab and toxicology lab, and approves both budgets prior to their formal submission to the Office of Financial Management.

Summary of Bill:

All powers, duties, functions, and employees of the State Toxicology Lab are transferred to the Bureau of Forensic Laboratory Services, which is created within the Washington State Patrol to combine the toxicology and crime lab as of July 1, 1999.

The Forensic Investigations Council will be involved in oversight and assistance with the preparation of both budgets, and must approve both budgets prior to formal submission to the Office of Financial Management. The council will submit three names to the chief of the Washington State Patrol to serve as possible director of the Bureau of Forensic Services. The council will further appoint a state toxicologist, and establish the policies, objectives and priorities of the Bureau of Forensic Investigatory Services.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect on July 1, 1999.

Testimony For: Combining the two labs would better serve the agencies that use the labs. The funding and oversight would remain the same, but the two labs combined will be better able to keep pace with the workload. The backlog of cases are being cleared up, and this will make better use of funding. This would also eliminate duplicate functions, as both labs would share administrative functions. The University of Washington has no opinion on the bill, and will still have interaction with the toxicology lab. Having all the scientists under one roof would create more efficiency through better coordination, as many cases involve both labs.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Dianne Oberquell, Thurston County Commissioner; Barry Logan, State Toxicologist; Larry Erickson, Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs; David McEachran, Forensics Investigation Council; and Eric Robertson, Washington State Patrol.