

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2637

As Reported By House Committee On:
Children & Family Services
Appropriations

Title: An act relating to background checks on persons in contact with vulnerable adults.

Brief Description: Requiring background checks on persons who will be in contact with vulnerable adults.

Sponsors: Representatives Tokuda, Conway, Cody, Schual-Berke, McIntire, Campbell, Rockefeller, Kenney, Haigh, O'Brien, Kagi, Hurst, Anderson and Van Luven; by request of Department of Social and Health Services.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Children & Family Services: 1/27/00, 2/3/00 [DPS];

Appropriations: 2/5/00, 2/7/00 [DP2S].

Brief Summary of Second Substitute Bill

- Requires background checks of persons applying for state positions involving unsupervised access to vulnerable adults.
- Mandates that the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) complete all state background checks in one month.
- Allows for provisional approval to hire an applicant based on the state background check when a federal check is also required but still pending.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives D. Sommers, Republican Co-Chair; Tokuda, Democratic Co-Chair; Boldt, Republican Vice Chair; Kagi, Democratic Vice Chair; Campbell; Carrell; Dickerson; Eickmeyer; Kastama and Pflug.

Staff: Tracey Taylor (786-7196).

Background:

The department investigates the background of most people coming in contact with vulnerable adults, children, and the developmentally disabled. This includes persons applying for a license to operate an agency that cares for, supervises, or treats vulnerable adults, children, or the developmentally disabled. Background checks of applicants for employment with these agencies, who come in direct contact with children and the developmentally disabled, are also conducted. In addition, individuals or businesses that provide care, supervision, or treatment of vulnerable adults, children, and the developmentally disabled under a state contract, must undergo a background check.

The background checks are conducted by the department through the Washington State Patrol's (WSP) database. Investigations examine the individual's history for convictions for offenses against children or other persons, convictions for crimes relating to the financial exploitation of a vulnerable adult, findings of child abuse in a civil action, issuance of a protective order for a vulnerable adult, and disciplinary boards' final decisions.

The actual background check of an applicant by the department should take less than a week, but applications may be delayed at the regional licensing office for longer. If a background investigation involves checking the thumbprint of an individual, it may take even longer.

The WSP also performs background checks directly. It may disclose to any business, organization, or individual, who provides services to vulnerable adults and children, the relevant background of persons applying for employment.

Summary of Substitute Bill: Background checks of persons applying for state positions involving unsupervised access to vulnerable adults are required. This includes positions involving contact for assessments, eligibility determinations, licensing and certification, investigations, surveys or case management. Background checks will also be conducted for such positions as required by federal law. Also, when the state is entering into a contract with a business, individual, or organization for case management, the state will conduct a background check. Finally, persons being considered for a state position that are directly responsible for the supervision, care or treatment of vulnerable adults must undergo a background check.

All state background checks must be completed within one month. If the Federal Bureau of Investigation check is also required, provisional approval to hire, pending the check, may be given for up to 180 days based on an applicant's state background check.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The substitute bill adds that the department complete all state background checks under this section in one month. In addition, if an applicant is not disqualified based on his state background check and is also required to have a federal check, the department may give provisional approval for 120 days pending the outcome of the federal check.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 4, 2000.

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

Testimony For: There is a long-standing policy to perform background checks on individuals who have unsupervised access to children, the developmentally disabled and vulnerable adults. Currently, this is not required of individuals hired for state positions that have unsupervised contact with this population. This bill will require that employees of DSHS will have the same type of background checks as those employed by the long-term care providers. This bill will continue to protect vulnerable adults; however, we should also look at including background checks on in-home and non-licensed care givers of disabled persons or children.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Kathy Leitch, Department of Social and Health Services; and Sherry Appleton, League of Women Voters.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The second substitute bill be substituted therefor and the second substitute bill do pass and do not pass the substitute bill by Committee on Health Care. Signed by 32 members: Representatives Huff, Republican Co-Chair; H. Sommers, Democratic Co-Chair; Barlean, Republican Vice Chair; Doumit, Democratic Vice Chair; D. Schmidt, Republican Vice Chair; Alexander; Benson; Boldt; Clements; Cody; Crouse; Gombosky; Grant; Kagi; Keiser; Kenney; Kessler; Lambert; Linville; Lisk; Mastin; McIntire; McMorris; Mulliken; Parlette; Regala; Rockefeller; Ruderman; Sullivan; Sump; Tokuda and Wensman.

Staff: Dave Johnson (786-7154).

Summary of Recommendation of Committee on Appropriations Compared to Recommendation of Committee on Children & Family Services: A provision was

added which makes the act null and void unless specific funding is provided in the biennial budget act.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date of Second Substitute Bill: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed; however, the bill is null and void if not funded in the budget.

Testimony For: This is agency request legislation from the DSHS. The state already requires providers with unsupervised access to vulnerable adults to undergo criminal background checks. It only makes sense to require the same for potential DSHS employees with similar access.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Kathy Leitch, Department of Social and Health Services, Aging and Adult Services.