

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2864

As Reported By House Committee On:
Transportation

Title: An act relating to traffic safety improvement.

Brief Description: Funding traffic safety improvements.

Sponsors: Representatives Skinner, Fisher, Mitchell, Ogden, Hankins and Hurst.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Transportation: 1/26/00, 1/31/00 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Creates the Traffic Safety Improvement Account.
- Repeals the Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Account.
- Places an additional \$10 penalty on traffic infractions.
- Places an additional \$50 penalty on traffic crimes.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 22 members: Representatives Fisher, Democratic Co-Chair; Mitchell, Republican Co-Chair; Cooper, Democratic 1st Vice Chair; Edwards, Democratic 2nd Vice Chair; Hankins, Republican Vice Chair; Buck; G. Chandler; Haigh; Hatfield; Hurst; Lovick; McDonald; Morris; Murray; Ogden; Pflug; Radcliff; Romero; Schual-Berke; Scott; Skinner and Wood.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Ericksen, Republican Vice Chair; DeBolt; Fortunato; Schindler and Woods.

Staff: Reema Shawa (786-7301).

Background:

The level of traffic safety in Washington today is much higher than it has ever been and is reaching unprecedented levels in many areas: traffic fatalities are decreasing each year, seatbelt use is at its highest level, pedestrian deaths are on the decrease, and there is an increased public awareness of the dangers of drinking and driving which has translated itself into significant decreases in alcohol related fatalities.

However, statistics indicate that the state still has its work cut out for itself when it comes to achieving a perfect traffic safety record. In 1998, the Office of the Administrator for the Courts (OAC) reported that there were 123,000 traffic crime convictions in Washington, which included 18,000 Driving Under the Influence (DUI) convictions. According to the latest report on fatal traffic collisions, 39.5 percent of all traffic deaths in the state involved alcohol, 35.9 percent of all traffic deaths involved speeding, 52 percent of all children under the age of 5 years old who were injured or killed in traffic accidents were unrestrained at the time of the crash, and 47 percent of all drinking drivers were under the age of 30. Statistics like these demonstrate the ongoing need for safety education, law enforcement, and effective state laws that, when combined, all help to increase traffic safety and decrease injuries and accidents on our highways and roads.

The Legislature has responded to the need for effective state laws by enacting legislation which has been critical in enabling law enforcement to make Washington's roadways safer. In 1983, child passenger restraint laws were enacted which required infants and children, 3 years of age and under, be placed in child safety car seats. In 1986, the Legislature enacted the seat belt law which required anyone who is operating or riding in a vehicle to wear a safety belt. And in 1998, the legal blood alcohol content level was lowered from .10 to .08.

At the agency level, the Washington Traffic Safety Commission responded to the need for increased traffic safety education and enforcement by establishing a number of programs aimed at increasing awareness and decreasing fatalities. A few examples of these programs include the Drug Recognition Expert (DRE) program which assists law enforcement by training individuals to identify when a person is under the influence of drugs; the Bike Helmet program which distributes helmets to low income families all over the state; Youth Traffic Safety programs which, among other things, provide safety education to school-aged children; the Occupant Protection Program which works to increase seat belt use; and child car seat usage, etc.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

In order to keep Washington's traffic safety record continually improving, HB 2864 adds provisions aimed at deterring dangerous driving and creates a way for offenders of traffic laws to support traffic safety programs.

Provisions are as follows:

- The Traffic Safety Improvement Account (TSIA) is created, the purpose of which is to provide funding through the Washington Traffic Safety Commission for programs that improve traffic safety.
- The Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Account and the Impaired Driving Safety Account is repealed.
- 50 percent of fine revenue collected from construction zone infractions and 63 percent of DUI reinstatement fee revenue is deposited into the TSIA.
- An additional penalty of \$10 is assessed on all traffic infractions, with the exception of infractions issued in school zones or construction zones. The revenue generated by this additional penalty is deposited into the TSIA.
- An additional penalty of \$50 is assessed on all traffic crimes and the revenue generated from this penalty is deposited in the TSIA.
- Courts cannot waive or reduce either of these additional penalties.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The Impaired Driving Safety Account is not repealed; courts can reduce or waive the additional penalties if the offender is found to be indigent.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 19, 2000.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect on July 1, 2000.

Testimony For: Provides much needed funding for traffic safety projects.

Testimony Against: Takes away valuable dollars for cities and counties.

Testified: (Supports) Steve Lind, Washington Traffic Safety Commission.

(Opposed) Michael Shaw, Association of Washington Cities; and Sophia Byrd, Washington State Association of Counties.