

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6162

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Judiciary, February 4, 2000

Title: An act relating to equal access to facilities of golf and country clubs.

Brief Description: Providing sanctions for golf and country clubs that do not allow equal access to club facilities.

Sponsors: Senators Fairley, Wojahn, Thibaudeau, Franklin and Kohl-Welles.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Judiciary: 1/14/2000, 2/4/2000 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6162 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Heavey, Chair; Kline, Vice Chair; Costa, Goings, Hargrove, Haugen and Thibaudeau.

Staff: Lidia Mori (786-7755)

Background: There is concern that the policies and practices of some country clubs in Washington discriminate on the basis of gender. The discrimination is believed to result in unequal access to club facilities such as bars and eating areas and policies that deny women prime tee times.

The Alcoholic Beverage Control Act is deemed in statute to be an exercise of the police power of the state for the protection of the welfare, health, peace, morals, and safety of the people of the state and its provisions are to be liberally construed for the accomplishment of that purpose.

Summary of Substitute Bill: No retail liquor license of any kind may be issued to a golf or country club that does not allow equal access to and enjoyment of all club facilities by all members of the club. To the extent that public use is allowed, members of the public must have equal access to and enjoyment of the club facilities in order for any kind of liquor license to be issued by the Washington State Liquor Control Board.

Classification as open space land— is removed by the county assessor upon determination by the assessor, after giving the owner written notice and an opportunity to be heard, that all or a portion of such land is in use as a golf or country club that does not allow equal access to and full enjoyment of club facilities by all members of the club. The classification as open space land— is also removed upon determination by the assessor that, to the extent the public is allowed to use the golf or country club, such members of the public are not allowed equal access to and full enjoyment of club facilities.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The substitute recodifies the changes in the original bill to a more appropriate section of the code and contains a delayed effective date. A golf or country club is not entitled to a spirits, beer, and wine private club license unless the golf or country club provides equal access to and full enjoyment of all club facilities to all members of the club and to the public to the extent the public is allowed. A golf or country club loses its classification as open space– if it does not allow equal access to and full enjoyment of all club facilities to all members of the club and to the public to the extent the public is allowed. However, a golf or country club may create membership classes that are not discriminatory and may conduct occasional tournaments that are restricted by gender.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 11, 2000.

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

Testimony For: The Northwest Woman’s Law Center regularly receives calls complaining about discrimination at golf clubs. There have been lawsuits on this issue across the country and some large awards have been given to the people bringing the lawsuits. It is the details of equality and how they are applied that make the concept of equality a reality. Some women pay the same amount as a man to join a country club or golf club, yet they are denied prime tee times and equal access to the club’s facilities.

Testimony Against: Golf clubs need to manage their course due to over-capacity. This bill is too broad and would make all golf clubs into public golf courts and restaurants.

Testified: Lisa Stone, Executive Director, Northwest Women’s Law Center (pro); Ann Dutton (pro); Lonnie Johns Brown, National Organization for Women (pro); Stewart Halsan, WA State Federation of Clubs (con); Lynn Melby, WA State Federation of Clubs (con); Gerald Sheehan, ACLU (pro); Judy Weigand (concerns).