

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6665

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Health & Long-Term Care, February 3, 2000

Title: An act relating to the prevention of infectious dental disease.

Brief Description: Requiring fluoridation of water.

Sponsors: Senators Thibaudeau, Winsley, Wojahn and Kohl-Welles.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Health & Long-Term Care: 1/31/2000, 2/3/2000 [DPS-WM].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6665 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Thibaudeau, Chair; Wojahn, Vice Chair; Costa, Deccio, Franklin and Winsley.

Staff: Rhoda Jones (786-7198)

Background: Fluoride is a chemical compound, a salt, which exists naturally in water supplies, but is also added to water systems to prevent and combat dental disease. As such, it is a regulated substance under the federal Safe Drinking Water Act, which establishes maximum permissible safe levels in water supplies.

Fluoride has been considered beneficial to dental health for several decades. Fluoride strengthens the calcifying tissue of babies' teeth as they develop and stabilizes the surface enamel of teeth in older children and adults, which prevents or delays tooth decay. According to numerous studies, both benefits occur from drinking water containing fluoride.

Fluoride is also found in toothpastes, mouthwashes, commercial drinks, pills, so-called "point-of-use" applications on home water supplies, and direct topical treatments by dental professionals.

Currently, an estimated 1.5 million people in Washington State get drinking water directly from 44 regulated public water systems that add fluoride to their water supplies as a therapeutic measure. Over 1 million people get fluoridated water indirectly because their system buys fluoridated water from other systems. Another 300,000 people in the state drink water from systems that have naturally occurring fluoride at the minimum level necessary to achieve the therapeutic effect.

Health and environmental concerns over the use of fluoride additives to water systems have been raised. Fluoride additives have been implicated in increased risk of cancer, bone disease such as arthritis and osteoporosis, blood disorders, and other forms of toxicity in

humans. Other concerns include the inability to regulate for "therapeutic levels" causing dental "fluorosis" which is a discoloration and pitting of teeth.

Environmental concerns about fluoride additives relate to its impact on wildlife, as treated sewage water is flushed into the environment. Fluoride is not removed from sewer effluent, and its impact on fish and other wildlife has triggered opposition to its use in public water systems.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The Legislature's intent to combat dental disease in vulnerable populations is expressed.

Wherever public water supplies serve more than 1,000 residential connections with less than the therapeutic levels of fluoride in that water, the level of fluoride must be adjusted by the local jurisdiction to conform with the recommended amount for optimal dental health. The Department of Health is directed to write rules to implement this act.

Jurisdictions may opt out of the fluoridation requirement upon adoption of an ordinance or resolution called by a petition of 25 percent of the registered votes of the last election.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The substitute adds the local opt-out provision.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 21, 2000.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Testimony For: There is solid scientific evidence accumulated over the past 50 years demonstrating that fluoride in water prevents dental disease. It is a significant public health success story.

Testimony Against: Fluoride is a poison and there is no way to adequately monitor the amount that will be consumed if it's added to water. The public shouldn't be forced to consume fluoride. The government has no right to medicate us against our will.

Testified: PRO: Steve Lindstrom, Sno-Kine Water District Coalition; Paul Barry, Children's Alliance; Mary Kremvasly Smith, DDS, Washington State Dental Association; Mark Kodey, DDS; Michael W. Easley, DDS, MPH, Washington Dental Association; CON: Lauralee Hanson; John Becker; Judith Ritchie; Paul Dronjevic; Jeff Green, Citizens For Safe Drinking Water; Tom Gillick; Jonathan V. Wright, M.D., Tahoma Clinic; Erin Boeger, Olympia Citizens for Pure Water; Darryl Bullington; James Olson-Murphy; Richard Foulkes, M.D.; Anne Anderson, RPN; Theresa Mitlowell.