

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2473

As Reported by House Committee On:
Children & Family Services

Title: An act relating to the governance of the Washington state school for the deaf.

Brief Description: Revising provisions for the governance of the Washington state school for the deaf.

Sponsors: Representatives Tokuda, Boldt, Dickerson, Kenney, Ogden, Chase, Dunn, Veloria, McDermott and Fromhold; by request of Governor Locke.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Children & Family Services: 2/4/02, 2/7/02 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Increases the powers and duties of the Board of Trustees at the Washington School for the Deaf (WSD).
- Reduces the power of the superintendent of the WSD to reflect the increased power of the Board of Trustees.
- Dissolves the current board and creates a new board with representatives from the nine congressional districts, of whom six must meet a required area of experience or expertise.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Tokuda, Chair; Kagi, Vice Chair; Darneille, Dickerson, Miloscia, Morell, Nixon and Orcutt.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Boldt, Ranking Minority Member.

Staff: Tracey Taylor (786-7196).

Background:

The Legislature established the Washington School for the Deaf (WSD) in 1886. The primary purpose of the school is to educate and train hearing-impaired children ages 3 through 21. The WSD is located in Vancouver and students who are not from the area may live on-campus in a cottage or dorm during the week.

The WSD is one of 50 agencies that report directly to the Governor, who appoints the superintendent. The school has a board of trustees that provides advice to the superintendent. The WSD staff members report to the superintendent and are employees of the state of Washington.

The Board of Trustees is composed of 13 members. The voting trustees representing the nine congressional districts are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate. There are five exofficio members, including a representative of the parent-staff organization, a representative of the classified staff designated by their exclusive bargaining representative, a representative designated by the WSD teachers' association and the president of the Washington State Association for the Deaf. Trustees serve terms of five years.

The Board of Trustees role is advisory in nature. Their powers and duties include:

- Studying and recommending comprehensive programs of education and training;
- Reviewing the admissions policy;
- Recommending candidates for the position of superintendent;
- Completing a biennial evaluation of the superintendent for the Governor;
- Recommending to the Governor that the superintendent may be removed for misfeasance, malfeasance or willful neglect of duty; and
- Participating in development of, and monitoring the enforcement of the school's rules and regulations.

During the past few years, a series of physical and sexual assaults has allegedly occurred at the WSD and over a half-dozen lawsuits have been filed against the state of Washington for alleged physical and sexual abuse that occurred at the school. In 2000 the Legislature passed SSB 6361 to address some of the concerns by providing training to students and staff, and allowing the school to refuse to enroll adjudicated Level III sex offenders. In February 2001, another alleged sexual assault occurred at the WSD.

In the spring of 2001, the Governor commissioned a review of the school's governance structure and the residential program. Dr. Kenneth D. Randall, the superintendent of the Arizona State School for the Deaf and Blind, authored the report on the WSD governance structure and made several recommendations for the Governor to consider. In the summer of 2001, the Governor directed the superintendent of WSD to implement certain safety initiatives based on the findings of the two reports. The Governor also appointed a six member Safety Changes Monitoring Panel to assist the superintendent and the school in implementing the safety initiatives.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The powers and duties of the Board of Trustees at the WSD are increased. The Board of Trustees will:

- Evaluate the superintendent on an annual basis, including a recommendation regarding the on-going retention of the superintendent;
- Submit a biennial state-of-the-school report;
- Approve the school's budget and funding requests;
- Approve and monitor the implementation of the school's policies, rules and regulations; and
- Approve the school's academic and residential program designs.

The superintendent's powers and duties are reduced to reflect the increased power of the Board of Trustees.

The composition of the board is changed. The nine member board must have:

- One member who is deaf or hearing impaired;
- Two members who are experienced educational professionals;
- One member who is engaged in research pertaining to the deaf and hearing impaired;
- One member who is experienced in providing residential services to youth; and
- One member who is the parent of a child who is deaf or hearing impaired and receiving or has received educational services related to deafness or hearing impairment from a public educational institution.

The Board continues to have representation for each of the nine congressional districts.

The Board of Trustees may meet as frequently as they deem necessary.

The term of the current board expires July 1, 2002, and the new board's term begins on July 1, 2002. The Governor is authorized to appoint members to the new board prior to the effective date of this act.

The Board of Trustees' biennial report, which will include recommendations for changes, will be delivered to the Governor and the Legislature.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute changes the composition of the Board of Trustees. The nine member board still has representation from the nine congressional districts, but it must also have:

- One member who is deaf or hearing impaired;
- Two members who are experienced educational professionals;
- One member who is engaged in research pertaining to the deaf and hearing impaired;
- One member who is experienced in provided residential services to youth; and

- One member who is the parent of a child who is deaf or hearing impaired and receiving or has received educational services related to deafness or hearing impairment from a public educational institution.

The substitute bill clarifies that the Board of Trustees has approval over all rules, regulations and policies, including the use of classrooms and other facilities and on-campus traffic.

The Board of Trustees' biennial report, which will include recommendations for changes, will be delivered to the Governor and the Legislature. The original bill requires the report only to be delivered to the Governor.

The substitute bill expires the current board and provides for the appointment of the new board on July 1, 2002.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: The current Board of Trustees of the WSD supports the grant of increased power and duties. They look forward to playing a more active role in the school. The school is in the midst of several changes and this bill will help ensure that the WSD has strong leadership. Moreover, this bill provides the empowerment to make more decisions at the local level to help ensure the safety of all the students at the WSD.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Representative Tokuda, prime sponsor; Kari Burrell, Governor's Executive Policy Office; and Representative Duane Sommers, Board of Trustees, Washington School for the Deaf.