

***Health Care Committee***

***HB 1629***

***Brief Description:*** *Creating an office of mental health ombudsman.*

***Sponsors:*** *Representatives Conway, Darneille, Cody, Edmonds, Ruderman, Schual-Berke, Keiser, Ballasiotes, Hunt, Lovick, Jackley, Fisher, Linville, Kenney, Miloscia, Edwards and Veloria.*

***Brief Summary of Bill***

- *Creates a Mental Health Ombudsman in the Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development.*

***Hearing Date:*** *2/22/01*

***Staff:*** *Dave Knutson (786-7146).*

***Background:***

*The current Mental Health Ombudsman Program is run from within the Regional Support Networks (RSNs) and state psychiatric hospitals. There is also a quality review team process overseen by the Mental Health Division. Ombudsmen are required to be functionally independent,– but are employed by and often located within the RSNs. Concerns exist that ombudsmen are not free to act in an independent manner and may not have the authority that other state ombudsman programs have.*

***Summary of Bill:***

*A Mental Health Ombudsman (MHO) is created. Services are provided by a nonprofit organization contracting with the Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development (CTED). CTED chooses the contractor through a competitive process, and provides some administrative support.*

*The Mental Health Ombudsman must investigate and resolve complaints at the lowest level appropriate, and to ensure that quality review teams are established. The MHO must*

*establish a statewide reporting system, engage in outreach activities, establish a toll-free number, and report to the Legislature annually.*

*The Mental Health Ombudsman must develop and implement a working agreement with the long-term care ombudsman, the children and family services ombudsman, and the Washington Protection and Advocacy System to coordinate services. The MHO also must establish working agreements with each RSN, the state psychiatric hospitals, and the mental health division. The RSNs and state hospitals must cooperate with the MHO and respond in writing to all recommendations, identifying the actions taken to address them.*

*The Legislature intends that CTED's state Mental Health Ombudsman Program expend at least the amount currently expended on RSN and state hospital ombudsman services and quality review teams, and the amount spent by the Mental Health Division on staff support and training for the quality review teams and ombudsman services.*

***Appropriation:*** *None.*

***Fiscal Note:*** *Requested on February 18, 2001.*

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