

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1884

As Reported by House Committee On:
Children & Family Services

Title: An act relating to telecommunications devices and services for the hearing or speech impaired.

Brief Description: Changing provisions relating to telecommunications services for hearing or speech impaired.

Sponsors: Representatives Ogden, Poulsen, Crouse and Kenney; by request of Department of Social and Health Services.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Children & Family Services: 2/21/01, 2/22/01 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- The bill updates Telecommunications Relay Service and Telecommunications Access Service statutory language for changes in technology and recent FCC changes, and deletes obsolete statutes.
- The bill broadens the authority of the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to determine program operating procedures and eligibility requirements.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Boldt, Republican Co-Chair; Tokuda, Democratic Co-Chair; Kagi, Democratic Vice Chair; Morell, Republican Vice Chair; Ballasiotes, Campbell, Darneille, Dickerson, Miloscia and Pflug.

Staff: Deborah Frazier (786-7152).

Background:

The Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH) of DSHS provides services to the

deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind communities throughout Washington. There are approximately 14,000 profoundly deaf citizens in Washington; approximately 62 percent receive a service from DSHS.

The ODDH, under a license from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), contracts for Telecommunications Relay Services (TRS) which provide telecommunications access to all teletypewriter (TTY) users in the state. The Telecommunications Access Service (TAS) distributes equipment such as TTYs, TTYs with Braille, amplified phones, and signaling devices to deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing, and speech-impaired persons.

The TAS buys equipment in bulk. Program applicants receive purchasing discounts based on income. Applicants who pay for the equipment own the equipment; others are loaned the state-owned equipment. Contracted trainers deliver and install the equipment, train the user, and troubleshoot any equipment malfunctions.

The program is funded through the telecommunications relay service excise tax. The program budget needs are determined by the ODDH and the Office of Financial Management. The Utilities and Transportation Commission then determines the amount of the excise tax needed to fund the program. The tax may not exceed 19 cents per month per access lines. The tax is identified on each ratepayer's bill with the statement Funds federal ADA requirement.–

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The bill updates Telecommunications Relay Service and Telecommunications Access Service statutory language for changes in technology and recent FCC changes, and deletes obsolete statutes.

The bill broadens the authority of DSHS to determine program operating procedures and eligibility requirements.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute restores the current definitions of hearing-impaired– and speech-impaired– that were deleted in the original bill.

The original bill applied the existing excise tax to both switched access lines provided by local exchange companies and to access lines provided by wireless companies. The substitute restores current law by deleting wireless companies– from application of the existing excise tax.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on February 21, 2001.

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

Testimony For: Washington is seen as the most proactive state in providing these services to hearing and speech-impaired persons. The original statute has not been updated since 1992. It doesn't reflect changes in telecommunications technology or changes in FCC regulations. This very necessary service handles over 1.4 million calls from Washington citizens each year.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Representative Ogden, prime sponsor; and G. Leon Curtis, Department of Social and Health Services.