

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2042

As Reported by House Committee On:

Juvenile Justice

Title: An act relating to authorizing the participation of youth as decision makers in dispositions of minor offenses and rules violations.

Brief Description: Creating youth courts.

Sponsors: Representatives Dunshee, Dunn and Kagi.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Juvenile Justice: 2/27/01 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Authorizes otherwise diversion-eligible juvenile offenses, civil infractions, and traffic infractions to be diverted to youth courts under certain circumstances.
- Requires the Office of the Administrator for the Courts to encourage juvenile courts to work with cities and counties to implement, expand, or use youth court programs.
- Requires the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to encourage school districts to implement, expand, or use student court programs for students who violate school rules, and authorizes local school boards to provide school credit for participation in youth court.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUVENILE JUSTICE

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Delvin, Republican Co-Chair; Dickerson, Democratic Co-Chair; Eickmeyer, Democratic Vice Chair; Marine, Republican Vice Chair; Armstrong, Darneille and Tokuda.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Carrell.

Staff: Jean Ann Quinn (786-7310).

Background:

Youth court programs are designed to provide an alternative within the juvenile justice system for first time, nonviolent juvenile offenders. In these programs, the appropriate sanction for a juvenile offender is determined by his or her peers. Juveniles participate in the youth court as jurors, lawyers, bailiffs, clerks, and judges.

Diversion is a contract between a juvenile accused of a criminal offense and a diversionary unit where the juvenile agrees to fulfill certain conditions in lieu of prosecution. Diversion agreements may be entered into only after the prosecutor or probation officer determines that there is probable cause to believe that the juvenile has committed the crime. The prosecutor must divert the case if the alleged offense is a misdemeanor, gross misdemeanor, or violation and it is the offender's first offense or violation. A case may not be diverted if the alleged offender is accused of a class A or B felony or certain class C felonies; if the offender has a certain criminal history; or if the offender was armed with a firearm when committing the offense. In most other cases, the prosecutor has discretion regarding whether to divert the case based on the length, seriousness, and recency of the offender's criminal history, and the circumstances surrounding the commission of the present offense.

A diversion agreement is limited to one or more of the following dispositions: (1) community service up to 150 hours; (2) restitution in the amount of the actual loss incurred by the victim; (3) up to 10 hours of counseling and/or 20 hours of educational or informational sessions; (4) a fine not to exceed \$100; (5) specific restrictions on the juvenile's movement; and (6) a requirement that the offender refrain from contact with the victim or witnesses.

Traffic and civil infraction cases involving juveniles under the age of 16 may also be diverted, and disposition is limited to 30 hours of community service, or educational or informational sessions.

Summary of Bill:

Youth courts are diversionary units operated under the supervision of the juvenile court system. Youth courts may enter into diversion agreements with diversion-eligible juveniles.

The Office of the Administrator for the Courts must encourage the juvenile courts to work with cities and counties to implement or expand youth court programs for juveniles who commit diversion-eligible offenses and civil or traffic infractions. They must be developed in accordance with American Probation and Parole Association Teen Courts Project guidelines, target offenders between the ages of eight and seventeen, and emphasize certain principles, such as accountability, problem solving, and education

regarding the consequences of certain behaviors. They may be established by law enforcement entities, municipal courts, district courts, juvenile probation departments, private nonprofit organizations, and schools.

Youth courts have authority over juveniles who, along with a parent or guardian, voluntarily request youth court involvement. The juvenile must admit to committing the offense, waive any privilege against self-incrimination, and agree to comply with the disposition ordered by the youth court. They also must be accompanied by a parent or guardian at all youth court appearances. Victims are given the opportunity to be notified, present, and heard at youth court proceedings.

Youth courts do not have authority over youth who are under the continuing jurisdiction of the juvenile court. They also may decline to accept a juvenile disposition for any reason, and may terminate a youth from youth court participation at any time. A youth may withdraw from the process at any time. The juvenile court is notified upon successful completion of the disposition, including complete satisfaction of any ordered restitution.

In addition to disposition options available under diversion, youth courts are also authorized to order participation in law-related classes, mentoring programs, and future youth court proceedings, periodic reporting to the youth court, and the writing of apology letters and essays. The youth court may not order confinement. Dispositions must be completed within 180 days from the date of referral. Juveniles can be required to pay not more than \$30 to cover the costs of youth court and reasonable fees for any counseling or education that is ordered.

Traffic and civil infraction cases involving juveniles may be diverted to youth court by any municipal or district court, with the consent of the juvenile court.

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction must encourage school districts to implement or expand student court programs for students who violate school rules. Local school boards are authorized to provide school credit for participation in youth court.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not Requested.

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

Testimony For: Teens are naturally rebellious, and often rebel against adult-imposed sanctions. Youth courts remove that antagonism from the process. Teens are much more receptive to, and have more respect for, decisions made by their peers. Teen are also much rougher on each other than adults would be in terms of the sanctions imposed. The

young people that are involved in teen court devote a lot of time to it, and have the necessary wisdom and maturity to make these decisions. Because of the types of sanctions that youth courts impose, the kids end up learning from their mistakes. They are also held accountable to complete the sanction imposed. The programs are endorsed by parents, law enforcement, educators, service organizations, and kids themselves. Youth court provides some actual consequences for low level offenses that may otherwise go unenforced because of the backup in the juvenile justice system. The bill provides a structure for youth court programs and ensures that kids are held accountable.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Representative Dunn; Chuck Allen, Granite Falls Police Department; Jennifer Gibson, Granite Falls Teen Court; Susan Goettsch, Granite Falls Boys and Girls Club/Teen Court; Martha Harden, Superior Court Judges Association; and Debbie Wilke, Washington Association of County Officials.