

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESJM 8014

As Passed House - Amended:

March 6, 2002

Brief Description: Requesting improvement to employment and training services for disabled persons.

Sponsors: By Senators Prentice, Winsley, Costa, Deccio, Thibaudeau, B. Sheldon, Fairley, Franklin, Shin, Rasmussen, Regala, Kastama, Patterson, Hochstatter, Gardner, Haugen, Honeyford, Constantine, Jacobsen, McAuliffe, Oke and Kohl-Welles.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Commerce & Labor: 2/20/02, 2/21/02 [DPA].

Floor Activity:

Passed House - Amended: 3/8/02, 94-0.

Brief Summary of Engrossed Bill (As Amended by House)

- Asks the executive heads of specified agencies to work together to improve employment and training services for persons with disabilities, to make recommendations for improving these services, and to report to the Legislature and Governor annually.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE & LABOR

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Conway, Chair; Wood, Vice Chair; Clements, Ranking Minority Member; Chandler, Kenney, Lysen and McMorris.

Staff: Chris Cordes (786-7103).

Background:

The state's workforce development system includes many agencies and programs. Under the federal Workforce Investment Act of 1998, and the Governor's implementing executive order, a one-stop system called "WorkSource" is intended to help workers find better jobs with wage progression and to provide information that will assist students and

workers to find appropriate training opportunities. The Work Force Training and Education Coordination Board (WTECB) develops information, establishes goals and a strategic plan to address workforce challenges, and provides a performance measurement system. At the local level, workforce development councils work with the WTECB and other state agencies to coordinate local workforce development programs and the local WorkSource system.

A number of state agencies provide services for persons in the disability community. For example, the Department for the Blind provides various services to qualified blind persons, including a program of vocational rehabilitation. This program is intended to assist blind persons to overcome vocational handicaps and to develop skills necessary for self-support and self-care. The Developmental Disabilities Council, a 33-member council appointed by the Governor, engages in activities that include providing grants to improve community services to disabled persons and advising the Governor and the Legislature on developmental disability issues. The Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment, with administrative support from the Employment Security Department, also advises the Governor, state and local governments, the business community, and the disability community on the federal Americans with Disabilities Act and disability policy. Within the Employment Security Department, disability placement specialists provide targeted services to persons with significant employment barriers due to disabilities, and coordinate with staff in the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Department of Social and Health Services.

Summary of Amended Bill:

The Legislature recognizes the need for skilled workers, and the potential source of such workers within the disability community, and recognizes a goal of encouraging fair and equal employment and training opportunities for disabled persons.

The Legislature requests the commissioner of the Employment Security Department, the director of the Department of Services for the Blind, the executive director of the Developmental Disabilities Council, the director of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in the Department of Social and Health Services, the executive secretary of the Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the executive director of the Work Force Training and Education Coordinating Board to work together to improve employment and training services for people with disabilities by:

- identifying effective employment and training opportunities in the state's worksource and education systems;
- identifying barriers to effective service delivery;
- identifying benchmarks and performance measures for determining success in providing employment and training services; and

- providing training/technical assistance to local work force boards and their service partners to improve outreach and delivery of services.

These agencies are also requested to inform the Legislature and the Governor on recommended statutory or administrative changes necessary to improve the delivery of services and to make an annual report on the outcomes of service improvement efforts. The report should include examples of specific programs that have benefitted people with disabilities. The annual report may be compiled by the executive directors of the Developmental Disabilities Council and the Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment from information provided by the other participating agencies.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Testimony For: The largest untapped pool of potential workers is in the disability community. The workforce needs to include the talents of these workers, especially if there is a labor shortage at the end of the recession. There is currently a strong federal initiative to improve coordination of employment and training services to the disabled community. A state work group has already been convened to work on these issues. This memorial would keep a focus on the issues and promote a sustained effort at the state level.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Toby Olson, Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment; Wes Pruitt, Work Force Training and Education Coordinating Board; and Terry Kohl, Rehabilitation Enterprises of Washington, Seattle Lighthouse for the Blind, and Provail.