

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESSB 6558

As Passed Senate, February 15, 2002

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: Senate Committee on Education (originally sponsored by Senators Kohl-Welles, Carlson and Hargrove; by request of Governor Locke).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Education: 2/4/02, 2/7/02 [DPS].

Passed Senate: 2/15/02, 48-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6558 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators McAuliffe, Chair; Eide, Vice Chair; Carlson, Finkbeiner, Hewitt, Hochstatter, Johnson, Kastama, Kohl-Welles, Rasmussen, Regala and Zarelli.

Staff: Kelly Simpson (786-7403)

Background: The Washington State School for the Deaf (WSD) is located in Vancouver, Washington, and serves to educate and train hearing impaired children. Under current law, the WSD is managed by a superintendent appointed by the Governor. Additionally, the WSD has a Board of Trustees, which is also appointed by the Governor, and is comprised of nine voting members (who serve subject to Senate consent) and four nonvoting members. The Board of Trustees serves in an advisory role only, making recommendations to the Legislature and superintendent regarding the development of programs for the hearing impaired and the operation of the WSD.

Summary of Bill: The powers and duties of the WSD Board of Trustees and superintendent are changed. The superintendent must supervise and manage the WSD; however, many of the superintendent's duties require Board of Trustees' approval. The Board of Trustees must provide oversight to the Legislature and Governor of the WSD. Additionally, the Board of Trustees has approval authority over the superintendent's recommended course of study at the WSD and the rules governing the operation of the WSD's residential facilities.

The composition of the board is changed; the board is still comprised of nine voting members, but they do not have to come from each of the state's congressional districts. When making appointments to the board, the Governor is encouraged to consider geographic diversity and is encouraged to appoint members from specified stakeholder groups. Additionally, the WSD superintendent does not serve as executive secretary for the board.

Finally, the board must: (1) report to both the Legislature and the Governor regarding the status of the WSD's operations, (2) oversee the development and implementation of a quality improvement plan, (3) monitor enforcement of education civil rights laws at the school, and (4) submit a biennial evaluation of the superintendent to the Governor and may recommend to the Governor the removal of the superintendent.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: July 1, 2002.

Testimony For: In light of recent allegations of abuse at the Washington State School for the Deaf (WSD), concerns have been raised regarding the current governance structure of the school. The WSD Board of Trustees should serve in more than just an advisory role. The board should have more direct legal authority over the school and should be providing oversight of the operations of the school.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: PRO: Senator Kohl-Welles, prime sponsor; Duane Sommers, School for th Deaf, Board of Trustees; Kari Burrell, Governor's Executive Policy Office; Gary King, WEA.

House Amendment(s): The amendment maintains the current law requirement that the Board of Trustees include one member from each of the state's nine congressional districts but permits the Governor to appoint members from specified stakeholder groups. Additionally, the board's biennial evaluation of the superintendent must include a recommendation regarding the retention of the superintendent.