

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 6625

As Passed Senate, February 16, 2002

Title: An act relating to formalizing the relationship between the department of social and health services and the state school for the deaf.

Brief Description: Formalizing the relationship between the department of social and health services and the state school for the deaf.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Human Services & Corrections (originally sponsored by Senators Kohl-Welles, Carlson, Hargrove, Zarelli, Long and Winsley).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections: 1/30/02, 2/6/02 [DPS].

Passed Senate: 2/16/02, 47-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6625 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Hargrove, Chair; Costa, Vice Chair; Carlson, Franklin, Hewitt, Kastama, Kohl-Welles, Long and Stevens.

Staff: Edith Rice (786-7444)

Background: In November 2001, the Office of the Family and Children's Ombudsman (OFCO) issued a review of the Washington State School for the Deaf (WSD). WSD is a state agency that serves deaf and hard-of-hearing children, ages three to 21. WSD has a residential and academic program. OFCO's review was prompted by student safety concerns raised by WSD parents after several alleged sexual assaults had been reported during the 1998-99 school year. WSD's superintendent established a Blue Ribbon Committee to review WSD's operations, including student safety. A final report was issued in March 2000. In February 2001 following a student-on-student sexual incident at WSD, Governor Locke directed the WSD superintendent to commission two external reviews. One was to review student safety in WSD's residential program; the other was to examine the school's governance structure.

The OFCO review differed from these other reviews in the following manner. OFCO sought to develop an accurate understanding of the nature and extent of sex-related incidents that were reported at WSD. It also sought to examine the response to these incidents by WSD, Child Protective Services (CPS) and law enforcement. The OFCO review made a number of recommendations in the following areas: Incident Documentation and Record Keeping, Behaviorally Disturbed Students, Expert Consultation on Sexual Aggression and Victimization, Child Protective Services, and Department of Licensed Resources. In this last topic area, OFCO recommended that CPS be formally authorized to investigate incidents at WSD involving alleged child abuse or neglect. OFCO also recommended that the Department

of Licensed Resources be given authority to follow up on safety-related deficiencies and concerns at WSD and to take action if school administrators do not act to address them.

Summary of Bill: The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) is authorized to investigate all incidents involving abuse and neglect at the Washington State School for the Deaf. DSHS must make recommendations for safety improvements following such an investigation. On a quarterly basis, DSHS must inspect and make recommendations to WSD for safety and health improvements. DSHS must conduct a comprehensive health and safety review of WSD every three years and must make a report annually to the Governor and Legislature on the results of any investigations.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 28, 2002.

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

Testimony For: Some clarification of responsibilities and standards would be helpful.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Nancy Zahn, Children's Administration/DSHS (pro).