

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1466

As Reported by House Committee On:

Education

Title: An act relating to natural science, wildlife, and environmental education.

Brief Description: Promoting natural science, wildlife, and environmental education.

Sponsors: Representatives Quall, Tom, Haigh, Talcott, McDermott, Anderson, Linville, Rockefeller, Ericksen, Upthegrove, Jarrett, Dunshee, Nixon, Kessler, Ruderman, Eickmeyer, Cox, Lovick, Hunt, Grant, Woods, Wallace, Pflug, Kenney and Fromhold.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/10/03, 2/25/03 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Creates an account as a repository for state and other monies provided to support natural science, wildlife, agriculture, forestry and environmental education programs provided to schools by nonprofit organizations.
- Directs the Superintendent of Public Instruction to distribute grants from the account on a competitive basis to eligible nonprofit organizations that provide matching funds or in-kind services and that meet additional criteria described in the legislation.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; McDermott, Vice Chair; Talcott, Ranking Minority Member; Tom, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Cox, Haigh, Hunter, McMahan and Santos.

Staff: Susan Morrissey (786-7111).

Background:

Various private entities, such as Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium, the Pacific Science Center, the Washington Audubon Society, and Woodland Park Zoo, have educational

outreach programs available to schools. These programs are designed to help children learn about science, wildlife, or the environment in a wide variety of ways including the development of materials for in-class curricula, field trips and out-of-school opportunities, as well as teacher training.

Under current Washington law, all schools give instruction in science with special reference to the environment. Specifically, the Washington Administrative Code requires that instruction about conservation, natural resources and the environment be provided in an interdisciplinary manner at all grade levels.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The Washington Natural Science, Wildlife, and Environmental Education Partnership Account (Account) is established. In addition, the Natural Science, Wildlife, and Environmental Education Grant Program (Grant Program) is created. The purpose of the Account and of the Grant Program is to promote proven and innovative natural science, wildlife, and environmental education programs that are fully aligned with the state's essential academic learning requirements (EALRs). The Grant Program is subject to the availability of funds in the Account. The Account consists of funds provided by the Legislature or other sources. An appropriation is not required for an expenditure from the Account.

Money from the Account is disbursed through a competitive grant-making process to nonprofit organizations that are tax exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the federal Internal Revenue Code and that can provide matching funds or in-kind services. The criteria for the grants is established by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and any expenditures from the fund must be authorized by the OSPI or its designee.

The Grants Program may make disbursements to programs involving forestry and agriculture as well as the environment, wildlife and natural science. The criteria must be based on compliance with the EALRs and programs must use methods that encourage critical thinking and meet at least one of four additional listed features. The OSPI will involve a cross-section of stakeholder groups to develop socially, economically, and environmentally balanced funding criteria. A list of non-exclusive, eligible uses for the grants is included.

Grants may not be used for any partisan or political activities.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

Agriculture and forestry programs are added to the list of programs that may be funded. The OSPI will involve a cross-section of stakeholder groups to develop socially, economically, and environmentally balanced funding criteria. All grants will encourage

critical thinking. Finally, a technical correction is made.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: This legislation will support schools and nonprofit groups in their efforts to provide exciting hands-on science programs to students and classroom teachers. Programs of this nature bring science alive for students. The organizations that provide these programs frequently partner with schools and districts to provide field experiences that are aligned with classroom instruction and the science essential academic learning requirements. This legislation is designed to help leverage private fund-raising and volunteer resources in support of those efforts and of science instruction in the public schools. Teachers have science resources available now, but they need help in using those resources effectively; a circumstance that this legislation will also address. Grants would be available only to nonprofit groups and to programs that are aligned to the state's academic standards.

Testimony Against (Original bill): This legislation is unbalanced and unnecessary. Nonprofit organizations are already providing programs to public schools. Agriculture and forestry are not included in the list of possible programs. Without safeguards, this legislation could be used to promote an unbalanced environmental agenda in the public schools. That agenda could be damaging to responsible use of natural resources.

Testified: (In support) Representative Quall, prime sponsor; Heath Packard, Audubon Washington; Katrina Weihs, Tahoma Audubon Society, Environmental Education Association of Washington; Erin Walker, Woodland Park Zoo Society; Lynn Ferguson, Washington Forest Protection Association; and Brenda Hood, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.

(Opposed) Shan Schnebly, Washington Farm Bureau.