

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5105

As Reported by House Committee On:

Education

Title: An act relating to educational interpreters.

Brief Description: Ensuring the quality and availability of educational interpreters.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Education (originally sponsored by Senators Fraser, B. Sheldon, Carlson, McAuliffe and Kohl-Welles).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 3/26/03, 3/27/03 [DPA].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill (As Amended by House Committee)

- Directs the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction to review and recommend options designed to increase and maintain the quality and availability of educational interpreters who assist deaf and hearing impaired students.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; McDermott, Vice Chair; Talcott, Ranking Minority Member; Tom, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Cox, Haigh, Hunter, McMahan, Rockefeller and Santos.

Staff: Susan Morrissey (786-7111).

Background:

By law, the Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in the Department of Social and Health Services (ODHH) must maintain lists of persons who are certified by the state or by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf to interpret for deaf and hearing impaired persons. These lists may also be maintained by community centers that operate interpreter referral services. The ODHH contracts with seven community service centers

around the state to provide advocacy, sign language interpreter information, education and workshops, information and referral, counseling, outreach and support services for clients and their families. Currently, there are approximately 14,000 profoundly deaf and 200 deaf-blind citizens in Washington.

The Higher Education Personnel Board has adopted qualifications for educational interpreters who provide sign language and oral interpretation for deaf and hard of hearing college students. There are three classifications for deaf interpreters. The qualifications include education and experience requirements. In addition, an assessment may be required of all interpreters.

There are 454 deaf students and 970 hearing impaired students in the K-12 system. Currently, there are no standardized qualifications required of educational interpreters who provide sign language interpretation to deaf and hearing impaired K-12 students.

Summary of Amended Bill:

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) must review and make recommendations on several options to increase and maintain the quality and availability of educational interpreters. The options include: requiring interpreters to meet national registry standards; requiring the State Board of Education (SBE) or the OSPI, as appropriate, to establish competencies for educational interpreters; requiring the OSPI to partner with higher education to provide a training program for deaf interpreters through video conferences, on-line courses, and face-to-face classes, and other options deemed viable by the office. By November 30, 2004, the office will report its findings and recommendations to the Governor, appropriate legislative committees, and the SBE.

Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill:

The amendment removes from consideration options that would require education interpreters to have baccalaureate or higher degrees. It removes an option that would require state or national certification and replaces the language with a reference to national registry standards, moves the study from the Professional Educator Standards Board to the OSPI, and has the OSPI report to appropriate legislative committees instead of the entire Legislature.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not Requested.

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

Testimony For: (In support) The K-12 system is failing deaf students. Many end up isolated. Many are unemployed or underemployed, in part because they have poor academic records due to low reading skills. Educational interpreters are the only lifelines to learning available to some of these students, but school districts are having a difficult time attracting and keeping good educational interpreters at the salary levels they offer to classified staff. Although many states are beginning to require certification or licensure for educational interpreters, this state doesn't have any standards for K-12 interpreters. One set of standards has been developed by the National Registry for Interpreters of the Deaf (NRID). People who seek to meet the NRID standards must show that they are effective with students. Workshops and training for interpreters is available in Seattle, but it isn't available in rural areas of the state. The state needs a long term strategy for recruiting and training effective educational interpreters. This legislation will address several of the critical elements of that strategy.

(With concerns) The PESB does not have a background in issues related to education interpreters so may not be the best agency to perform the study. Perhaps the OSPI or legislative staff would be more appropriate study coordinators. The PESB would need additional resources to fund the study process. HB 1971, currently in the Senate Education Committee, creates a task force to consider the educational issues faced by deaf and hearing impaired students. Perhaps the two bills should be coordinated. Any review of issues facing education interpreters should include advice from a number of groups interested in the education of deaf and hearing impaired students.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: (In support) Senator Fraser, prime sponsor; Lucinda Young, Washington Education Association; and Anne Del Vecchio, Washington State Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf.

(With concerns) Greg Williamson, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction; Denise Marychild, Washington School for the Deaf; and Jennifer Wallace, Professional Educator Standards Board.