

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 6457

As Reported by House Committee On:
Children & Family Services

Title: An act relating to adoption.

Brief Description: Creating a study panel for adoption issues.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Children & Family Services & Corrections (originally sponsored by Senators Swecker, Stevens, Deccio, Prentice, Parlette, Hargrove, Jacobsen, Kohl-Welles and Rasmussen).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Children & Family Services: 2/23/04, 2/25/04 [DPA].

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

- Convenes a legislative study panel on adoption issues.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Darneille, Vice Chair; Boldt, Ranking Minority Member; Roach, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bailey, Dickerson, Miloscia, Pettigrew and Shabro.

Staff: Cynthia Forland (786-7152).

Background:

Adoptions in the state occur through licensed private agencies, the Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) of the Department of Social and Health Services, and independent agents. Requirements, processes, and services offered vary with each of these three methods of adoption, as well as vary by individual agencies.

Children who may be adopted through the DCFS are children residing in foster care who have been abused or neglected and cannot be reunited with their birth parents. Children who may be adopted through private agencies include healthy infants and young children,

children from other countries, children with special needs, and children in foster care. Children who may be adopted independently include healthy infants, stepchildren, children from other countries, and relative and other non-agency placements.

Summary of Amended Bill:

It is the intent of the Legislature to convene a study panel on issues relating to adoption composed of four members from the Legislature: two members of the Senate to be appointed by the President of the Senate, including one member of the majority party and one member of the minority party; and two members of the House of Representatives to be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, including one member from the majority party and one member from the minority party.

The study panel is required to invite the participation of the Governor. The study panel is also required to create an advisory committee to participate in the study panel composed of invited representatives from federally recognized Indian tribes, the Washington State Bar Association, the judiciary, and adoption agencies and child-placing agencies, including state agencies, nonprofit agencies, and those agencies providing services for domestic or international adoptions; adoptive parents; and adoptees.

The study panel is required to study and report findings and recommendations, as well as solicit comments from the community, regarding the current adoption statutes and policies related to the following issues:

- adoption-related fees;
- barriers to adoption;
- child selling and buying;
- adoption facilitation, advertising, and marketing;
- discrimination in adoption based upon ability to pay, race, color, or national origin of child or parent;
- background checks; and
- agency licensing and credentialing.

The study panel is required to report its findings to the Legislature by January 1, 2005.

Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill:

Assisted reproductive technology is eliminated from the issues to be studied by the study panel. Technical changes are also made to language in the bill to increase clarity.

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) This bill provides an excellent opportunity to undertake a review of current adoption statutes and policies. There are different processes and fee structures for the different methods of adoption in the state. The bill should be amended to remove assisted reproductive technology from the issues to be studied, otherwise that could become the predominant issue in the study. The Indian tribes in the state operate systems to protect children, just as the state and the Department of Social and Health Services do. The tribes relish the opportunity to participate in this study.

(With changes) This bill should not be a study of adoption issues. The original bill should be under consideration.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Art Cantrall, Department of Social and Health Services; Laurie Lippold, Children's Home Society; and Randy Scott, Colville Confederated Tribes and Quinault Nation.

(With changes) Ken Hutcherson, Antioch Bible and Adoptions.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.