

SENATE BILL REPORT

E2SHB 2481

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Judiciary, February 27, 2004

Title: An act relating to increasing marriage license fees to fund domestic violence programs.

Brief Description: Increasing marriage license fees to fund domestic violence programs.

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Dickerson, Lovick, Kessler, McIntire, Lantz, Upthegrove, G. Simpson, Darneille, Tom, Moeller, Chase and Santos).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Judiciary: 2/26/04, 2/27/04 [DP, DNP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators McCaslin, Chair; Brandland, Hargrove, Haugen, Kline and Thibaudeau.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senator Esser, Vice Chair.

Staff: Jinnah Rose-McFadden (786-7421)

Background: Marriage license fees in Washington are established by statute. County auditors must collect the following fees for marriage licenses:

- \$8.00, retained by the county for processing marriage licenses;
- \$5.00, transmitted to the State Treasurer for the prevention of child abuse and neglect; and
- \$10.00, transmitted to the State Treasurer for the Displaced Homemaker Act.

If approved by the county legislative body, the auditor may impose the following additional fees for marriage licenses:

- Up to \$15.00, for funding family services, such as family support centers; and
- Up to \$8.00, for family court services.

In addition, county auditors must impose various surcharges when recording any instrument, including the following:

- \$2.00, for the auditor's Centennial Document Preservation and Modernization Account;
- \$1.00, for the Local Government Archives Account; and

- \$1.00, for the construction and improvement of a specialized regional facility in eastern Washington for archives and records.

Because some of the fees are optional, not all counties charge the same amount for marriage licenses; fees currently range from \$27.00 to \$54.00.

Summary of Bill: County auditors must collect an additional \$10.00 for marriage licenses, to be deposited in a Domestic Violence Prevention Account in the custody of the State Treasurer.

The revenue collected from this fee must be used to fund nonshelter community-based services for victims of domestic violence. The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), in consultation with the Department of Health (DOH), must administer the funds. DSHS and DOH may establish minimum standards for nonshelter community-based services receiving the funds.

County auditors may collect an additional \$3.00 for marriage licenses to fund domestic violence prevention services within the county.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: In Washington State, there is a real funding crisis with regard to domestic violence services and programs for victims. Thirty states have provided mechanisms, through marriage license fees, to fund domestic violence programming. This bill would allow Washington to join those states in providing a steady and reliable funding stream for domestic violence services.

Cities and counties are in critical need of a funding stream to provide non-shelter domestic violence services to victims. It is essential that under-served communities receive the support and services they need. Statistics show that under-served communities are at a greater risk for domestic violence related homicide, because individuals are less likely to enter shelter services and are unaware of non-shelter services in their community.

Studies show that abuse is cyclical and that this cycle cannot be broken without intervention. Studies also show that children are heavily impacted by witnessing domestic violence and later exact a price on society by failing to thrive academically or by perpetrating violent acts themselves. Providing prevention services and outreach, then, saves the state money in the long-run.

Testimony Against: This bill represents bad policy because it penalizes all people getting married for the bad acts of a few. Domestic violence is not a widespread problem. Justice Department statistics show that less than 1 percent of the population suffers from domestic violence.

Testified: PRO: Representative Mary Lou Dickerson; Larry Pederson, Thurston County Network; Grace Huang, WA State Coalition of Domestic Violence Programs; Marisol

Melendez, Tacoma/Pierce County YMCA; Linda Olsen, Eastside Domestic Violence Program; CON: Lisa Scott, TABS.