

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6454

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Education, February 4, 2004

Title: An act relating to the use of portable or cellular phones or paging telecommunications devices by students.

Brief Description: Regarding the use of portable or cellular phones or paging telecommunications devices by students.

Sponsors: Senators McAuliffe, Roach, Fairley, Eide, Regala, Winsley, Prentice, Shin, Kline, Thibaudeau, Johnson, Franklin, Keiser, Rasmussen, Zarelli, Jacobsen and B. Sheldon.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Education: 1/27/04, 2/4/04 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6454 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Johnson, Chair; Finkbeiner, Vice Chair; Carlson, Eide, McAuliffe, Pflug, Rasmussen and Schmidt.

Staff: Susan Mielke (786-7422)

Background: According to the Education Commission of the States, policies restricting student possession of pagers and cellular phones on school property were first enacted by state legislatures in the late 1980s and early 1990s in response to concerns that students were carrying such devices to participate in gang activity or drug sales, as well as concerns that these devices served as a distraction in the classroom setting. In 1997, the Washington Legislature authorized school districts to adopt policies that limit the possession of such devices. However, in response to the use of cellular phones to contact family members during the events at Columbine High School in April 1999, during the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and in other emergency situations, there is some interest in ensuring students may possess such devices but impose limitations on the use of such devices.

Summary of Substitute Bill: School districts must modify any district policy that limits the possession of cellular phones or pagers to limit only the use of such devices. However, the policies may prohibit an individual student from possessing a cellular phone or pager if the student violates the district's use policy.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The district policies must address cell phone/pager use on public school transportation. It is clarified that districts must amend any current policies that prohibit possession of these devices. It is clarified that these are district policies.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: This is a reasonable policy. Parents want to keep in touch with their children, especially when emergencies arise. Cell phones give the students and their parents an extra measure of security. When cell phones first became available they may have been disruptive but now people are use to having cell phones around. Students know that the phones should be turned off during class. Some students may mis-use their phone during school but under this bill a school district policy could prohibit individual students who do not follow the rules. Many other states that originally enacted laws prohibiting possession of cell phones have changed their laws to limit the use of the phones instead.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Mary Douglas, Snohomish High School student; Barbara Johnshoy, Snohomish High School student; Rainer Houser, AWSP.