

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 2181

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Children & Family Services

**Title:** An act relating to creating an autism task force.

**Brief Description:** Creating an autism task force.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Dunshee, Darneille, Williams, Simpson, Linville, Morrell, O'Brien, Chase and Santos.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Children & Family Services: 3/2/05 [DPS].

### Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Creates the Caring for Washington Children with Autism Task Force to study and make recommendations to the Legislature regarding the growing incidence of autism and ways to improve the delivery and coordination of autism services in the state.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

**Majority Report:** The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Roberts, Vice Chair; Hinkle, Ranking Minority Member; Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Darneille, Dickerson, Dunn, Haler and Pettigrew.

**Staff:** Cynthia Forland (786-7152).

#### **Background:**

Autism is a neurologically based developmental disability that impacts the normal development of the brain in the areas of social interaction and communication skills. Autism affects an estimated one in 250 births, resulting in as many as 1.5 million Americans with autism. The incidence of autism is estimated to be growing at a rate of 10 to 17 percent each year.

Research into the neurobiological, genetic, and environmental bases of autism is ongoing. Currently, there is no known single cause of the disorder. Autism can be detected as early as 18 months of age, which offers the opportunity for intervention during the period when the

brain is most plastic. Such early intervention can result in a significant increase in IQ and language ability and a decrease in support services needed later in life.

Autism is a disorder that may qualify an individual for services through the Division of Development Disabilities (DDD) in the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). The DDD provides or purchases a broad range of residential, therapeutic, employment, family support, and nursing services for eligible persons and their families both in institutions and in the community. Approximately 1,300 individuals whose primary diagnosis is autism are served by the DDD, making up 3 percent of the total number of individuals who have been determined to be eligible for services through the DDD.

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### **Summary of Substitute Bill:**

The Caring for Washington Children with Autism Task Force (Task Force) is created to study and make recommendations to the Legislature regarding the growing incidence of autism and ways to improve the delivery and coordination of autism services in the state.

The Task Force is to consist of 14 members, as follows:

- four members of the Legislature, including two members of the Senate appointed by the President of the Senate, one of the majority party and one of the minority party, and two members of the House of Representatives appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, including one of the majority party and one of the minority party; and
- 10 additional members appointed by the Governor, including at least the following:
  - two parents of children with autism; and
  - representatives of the Autism Center at the University of Washington, the Department of Health (DOH), the DSHS, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), a local school district, and an educational service district.

The Task Force is required to:

- review the available literature and consult with experts to gain an understanding of the causes of autism and its incidence in Washington;
- assess the availability of services currently provided for early screening, diagnosis, and treatment of autism;
- assess the availability of services to assist families of individuals with autism;
- review the effectiveness of programs and services provided to individuals with autism and their families;
- review other issues and concerns that the Task Force believes would be helpful in arriving at sound policy recommendations; and
- complete its review and submit its recommendations to the appropriate policy and fiscal committees of the Legislature and the Governor by December 1, 2006.

The DOH is required to be the lead agency in providing staff needed for the performance of the work of the Task Force. The DOH may seek additional staff assistance from the OSPI and the committee staff of the Legislature.

Legislative members of the Task Force are to be reimbursed for travel expenses in accordance with state law. Nonlegislative members, except those representing an employer or organization, are entitled to be reimbursed for travel expenses in accordance with state law.

**Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:**

Provision is made for reimbursement of travel expenses for members of the Task Force. A reference to the Task Force is corrected.

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**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:** (In support) This Task Force is desperately needed. There is a lot of misinformation out there and a lot of good information. In order to make good decisions, the Legislature needs to understand what training and programs are available and what programs are beneficial, to use resources in the best way possible. The issue of autism has been in the forefront in the media lately. Estimates are that, at the rate autism has been growing, by 2012 the rate will be one in seven. This is an issue that we really need to take a look at, and start addressing the need for services. There is a huge need for services. We need to look at how we work with people who have autism.

(With comments) This Task Force is needed because the systems and professionals that serve our children are often at cross-purposes. There is clearly a lack of training, education, or expertise in Asperger's Syndrome, which is within the spectrum of autism, among even the best of professionals with the best of intentions. You should only embark on this Task Force if it is with open minds and if you do not feed into the stereotypes and pre-conceived notions about autism.

This Task Force is such a good idea. But when you set up this Task Force, don't forget that there are older kids with autism who need services. Many programs do not accept kids over 12 years old.

**Testimony Against:** None.

**Persons Testifying:** (In support) Diana Stadden, Autism Society of Washington; and Robert M. Wardell.

(With comments) Donna Obermeyer, Washington State Special Education Coalition; and Jean Leonard.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.