

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 5311

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: Senators Rasmussen, Jacobsen, McAuliffe, Mulliken, Stevens, Roach, Shin, Kohl-Welles and Spanel.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Children & Family Services: 3/28/05, 3/30/05 [DPA].

Brief Summary of Bill
(As Amended by House Committee)

- Creates the Caring for Washington Individuals 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.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. 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.

Summary of Amended Bill:

The Caring for Washington Individuals 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;
 - 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; and
 - an expert in the field of early intervention services.

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.

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The name of the task force created in the bill is changed from the Caring for Washington Children with Autism Task Force to the Caring for Washington Individuals with Autism Task Force (Task Force). It is provided that strategies about how to best prevent, identify, treat, and accommodate the needs of individuals, rather than only children, with autism and their families are urgently needed.

The membership of the Task Force is expanded to include an expert in the field of early intervention services.

It is provided that 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.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: (Original bill) The more communication that we can get out to the public about what a devastating disease this is, the better. When you realize that one out of every 166 children born today is going to be autistic, then you know that we need to do something fast. We need to set out the best way of doing things. We need to bring people together, so that these kids can get educated and be successful. If you intervene early with these children, most of the time they do not need special education. The bill should be amended to include all individuals with autism, not just children.

This Task Force will help legislators to understand the good tools and interventions to recommend for funding. It is estimated that one in every seven children will be born with autism by 2012, which is not that far away. A lot of parents and grandparents out there raising children with autism are so overwhelmed. Parents are on their own, and have to find the pathway of how to teach their individual children. The Task Force could figure out how to educate and train parents, school district personnel, and agencies on how to deal with the autism spectrum and how to build collaborative relationships. The Task Force could also delineate the roles and responsibilities of the school districts, the agencies, and the parents, because right now those roles are confusing.

(With amendments) Autism is on a spectrum. There is a wide variety of abilities and challenges in these children. No child with autism is the same as another child with autism,

although there are a few core similarities. This is a very, very complex issue. The knowledge and research is mushrooming about what is effective for these children. There is also a lot of controversy and myth out there, which is difficult to sort out. The addition of a birth-to-three provider to the Task Force should be considered. We should tap into the resources that are out there, and make sure that families know about and connect with those available services.

It is so important that we consider intervention as well as early intervention. The bill should be amended to apply to individuals with autism rather than just children with autism.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: (Original bill) Senator Rasmussen, prime sponsor; Diana Stadden, Autism Society of Washington; and Donna Obermeyer, Washington State Special Education Coalition.

(With amendments) Kathy Stewart, Washington Occupational Therapy Association; and Jean Leonard.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.