

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5311

As Passed Senate, March 14, 2005

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: Ways & Means: 3/2/05, 3/7/05 [DP].

Passed Senate: 3/14/05, 48-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Prentice, Chair; Doumit, Vice Chair; Fraser, Vice Chair; Zarelli, Ranking Minority Member; Brandland, Fairley, Hewitt, Kohl-Welles, Parlette, Pflug, Pridemore, Rasmussen, Regala, Roach, Rockefeller, Schoesler and Thibaudeau.

Staff: Tim Yowell (786-7435)

Background: Autism is a complex neurological disorder that prevents normal brain development in the areas of communication and social interaction. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that autism may affect as many as one of every 250 births. Autism typically appears during the first three years of life, and can be detected as early as 18 months of age by knowledgeable professionals. Data compiled by the U.S. Department of Education indicates that diagnoses of autism are increasing rapidly.

Research demonstrates that early, intensive interventions can significantly increase a child's mental, communication, and behavioral skills. Once identified, children with autism in Washington are eligible for early intervention and family support services through the Department of Social and Health Services, and for special education when they reach school age. However, there is concern that many children are not being identified as soon as they might be; and that new strategies need to be developed to better prevent, identify, and treat autism.

Summary of Bill: The Caring for Washington Children with Autism Task Force is established to study and to make recommendations regarding the incidence of autism in Washington, and ways in which service coordination and delivery could be improved. The task force is to submit recommendations to the Governor and Legislature by December 2006.

The task force is to consist of fourteen members, including two members of the Senate; two members of the House of Representatives; and ten parents and public agency representatives appointed by the Governor.

The Department of Health is to provide staff support to the task force, with additional assistance from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instructions, and legislative committee staff.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: Yes.

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

Testimony For: The incidence of autism is escalating rapidly. It is a devastating disease for families and society. There is a great deal of misunderstanding and mis-information about its causes and treatment. Early intervention can significantly reduce future disability. The proposed task force will provide a solid information base for future legislative strategies.

Testimony Against: None.

Who Testified: PRO: Senator Rasmussen, prime sponsor; Diana Stadden, Autism Society of Washington; Robert Wardell.

House Amendment(s): The amendment replaces the term "children" with "individuals" throughout the bill. An expert is added in early intervention services to the Task Force membership. It also provides for reimbursement of Task Force members' travel expenses.

Passed House: 95-0.