

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESB 6606

As Passed Senate, February 14, 2006

Title: An act relating to standards for educational interpreters for students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Brief Description: Requiring standards for educational interpreters for students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Sponsors: Senators Fraser, Oke, Fairley, Deccio, Berkey, McAuliffe, Keiser, Kline, Regala, Honeyford, Thibaudeau, Mulliken, Pridemore, Rockefeller, Delvin, Rasmussen and Kohl-Welles.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education: 1/27/06, 1/30/06 [DP-WM, w/oRec].

Passed Senate: 2/14/06, 46-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING, K-12 & HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators McAuliffe, Chair; Pridemore, Vice Chair, Higher Education; Schmidt, Ranking Minority Member; Berkey, Delvin, Eide, Kohl-Welles, Pflug, Rasmussen, Rockefeller, Schoesler and Shin.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senators Benton and Carrell.

Staff: Susan Mielke (786-7422)

Background: Under federal and state law, school districts are required to provide a free and appropriate education to children who by reason of a disability need special education and related services. "Special education" means specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. "Related services" includes supportive services that help the child benefit from special education. Sometimes this means that school districts have an obligation to provide educational sign language/oral interpreters for deaf or hard-of-hearing students.

Currently, there is no law that requires educational interpreters to be certified or to meet standardized qualifications or competencies. There is a national and a state certification that may be obtained on a voluntary basis. A college degree is not a prerequisite for either certificate. There are three community college programs that offer classes to prepare for the tests but they train interpreters for adult-to-adult community settings and are not designed to meet the needs of children in the public school setting. Wenatchee Valley Community College recently established a two-year educational interpreter training program.

Summary of Bill: To the extent funds are appropriated, the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) must develop standards for educational interpreters of students who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. The standards must focus on the specific skills and knowledge necessary to serve the communication needs of students. The SPI must recommend an implementation schedule for the standards.

When developing the standards, the SPI must convene an advisory committee including representatives of interpreters, interpreter educators, school district coordinators of deaf programs, leaders in the deaf community, and parents of deaf children.

The SPI must report on any standards developed for educational interpreters and must obtain formal legislative approval before implementing any standards for educational interpreters.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Testimony For: It is important to get better qualified interpreters for our deaf students in public schools. If a child's interpreter cannot interpret the concepts taught in the classroom then the child's learning is negatively impacted. We are leaving these children behind because they do not have access or have only limited access to the verbal educational information provided in our schools because too many interpreters are underqualified. When the interpreter is underqualified the child cannot fully participate in their own education; it is just like when there is not an interpreter at hearings such as this. Those who are deaf cannot fully participate. Washington is one of 21 states that do not have competency standards for educational interpreters. We should join the 29 states that do. This bill will help deaf children and the interpreters of those children.

Testimony Against: None.

Who Testified: PRO: Senator Karen Fraser, prime sponsor; Carol Carrothers, Washington Sensory Disabilities Services; Robin Taylor, Washington Sensory Disabilities Services; Lorraine Maida, Tacoma School District; Terri Thurston, Washington Sensory Disabilities Services; Isabel Munoz-Colon, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; Lucinda Young, Washington Education Association; Christy Perkins, Washington State Special Education Coalition; and Larry Petersen, Washington State Association of the Deaf.