
SENATE BILL 6664

State of Washington

59th Legislature

2006 Regular Session

By Senators Kastama, Oke, Rasmussen, Carrell, Shin, Benson, Hargrove, Esser, Jacobsen, Roach, Sheldon and Swecker

Read first time 01/18/2006. Referred to Committee on Human Services & Corrections.

1 AN ACT Relating to a pilot program for family counseling; creating
2 new sections; and making an appropriation.

3 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

4 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature declares that:

5 (1) There is credible evidence that children of divorce are at
6 greater risk for observable behavior and adjustment problems; parental
7 divorce has been found to predict unhealthy behaviors such as smoking,
8 drug use, and poor psychological adjustment; and children of divorced
9 parents face a greater mortality risk than people whose parents
10 remained married until they reached age twenty-one;

11 (2) Strong family relationships result in stronger communities and
12 place less of a fiscal burden on the state; and

13 (3) Relationship skills can be learned, and once learned these
14 skills can facilitate communication and assist couples in avoiding
15 conflict. In addition, effective relationship skills are utilized in
16 parenting, the workplace, schools, neighborhoods, and other
17 relationships.

1 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** (1) The secretary of the department of
2 health shall establish a pilot program to provide merit checks of no
3 more than one hundred dollars to no more than four hundred fifty
4 couples who complete a family preparation course. Matching funds may
5 be used to increase the number of participants in the pilot program.
6 The pilot program must begin no later than January 1, 2007, and
7 continue for no more than five years, in a county with a population
8 between seven hundred twenty thousand and one million. Under the pilot
9 program, a man and a woman who intend to apply for a marriage license
10 may, together or separately, complete a family preparation course of
11 not less than four hours with a family preparation course provider
12 registered with the clerk of the county. The county auditor shall
13 provide to couples interested in applying for a marriage license in the
14 county, or to a qualified instructor, certificate of completion forms
15 for the family preparation course and information that includes a brief
16 explanation of the course of required instruction, the required length
17 of time of the course, and an explanation of the qualified instructor
18 requirements. Upon applying for a marriage license, either applicant
19 may verify completion of a family preparation course by filing with the
20 county auditor a valid certificate of completion from a registered
21 course provider. Completed forms must include names and addresses of
22 participants, the name and work address of the course provider,
23 signatures of participants attesting to the completion of the required
24 coursework and the required length of instruction, and the signature of
25 the qualified instructor attesting to being a qualified instructor and
26 providing the required coursework and time requirement for the
27 participants.

28 (2) For the purposes of this section, a family preparation course
29 must include instruction regarding:

- 30 (a) Conflict management;
- 31 (b) Communication skills;
- 32 (c) Financial responsibilities in a marriage; and
- 33 (d) Children and parenting responsibilities.

34 (3) The family preparation course must be at least four hours in
35 length and must be taken from a qualified instructor who is a:

- 36 (a) Licensed psychologist;
- 37 (b) Certified social worker;
- 38 (c) Certified marriage and family therapist;

- 1 (d) Certified mental health counselor;
2 (e) Registered counselor with relevant training or coursework;
3 (f) Provider designated by a family court judge or commissioner; or
4 (g) Official representative of a religious institution, if the
5 representative has relevant training.

6 (4) Any costs of the family preparation course must be paid by the
7 applicant. Upon receipt of a certificate of completion by the county
8 auditor, the county auditor shall forward along with the marriage
9 certificate the individual's name and address and a copy of the
10 certificate of completion to the department of health's statistics
11 center for the purposes of issuing merit checks as provided under this
12 section. The county auditor shall also send to the department of
13 health's statistics center information on divorced or annulled couples
14 who had previously participated in a family preparation course.

15 (5) When the department of health receives a marriage certificate
16 from the county auditor that includes a certificate of completion of a
17 family preparation course issued by a qualified instructor consistent
18 with this section, the department shall, within sixty days, issue a
19 merit check to the couple, not to exceed one hundred dollars per
20 married couple.

21 (6) The department of health shall report to the appropriate
22 committees of the legislature five years after the completion of the
23 pilot program. The committees shall make recommendations on whether
24 the program should be initiated statewide based on the results of the
25 number of participants who are still married as opposed to the average
26 divorce rate.

27 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** The sum of forty-five thousand dollars, or
28 as much thereof as may be necessary, is appropriated for the biennium
29 ending June 30, 2007, from the general fund to the department of health
30 for the purposes of this act.

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