

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6429

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Human Services & Corrections, February 05, 2008

Title: An act relating to analyzing school attendance and truancy.

Brief Description: Requiring the Washington institute for public policy to analyze school attendance and truancy.

Sponsors: Senators Hargrove, Stevens, McAuliffe and Carrell.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections: 1/31/08, 2/05/08 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6429 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Hargrove, Chair; Regala, Vice Chair; Stevens, Ranking Minority Member; Brandland, Carrell, Marr and McAuliffe.

Staff: Jennifer Strus (786-7316)

Background: The "Becca" bill which changed a number of practices and procedures regarding truancy was enacted in 1995. Since that time, school districts and courts have taken difference approaches to administering the truancy statutes. There has been no recent comprehensive, statewide review of the implementation of the truancy statutes.

Summary of Bill (Recommended Substitute): The Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) is to conduct an analysis of local practices regarding compulsory school attendance and truancy.

In this analysis, WSIPP is to review the following:

- survey a representative sample of local school expenditures on truancy;
- conduct a comprehensive analysis and evaluation of evidence-based, research-based, promising and consensus-based truancy intervention and prevention programs;
- survey school districts on their truancy prevention and intervention programs and services currently available and report gaps if any;
- analyze and report on the extent to which Washington's current programs are evidence-based, research-based, promising or consensus-based; and,
- survey school districts as to the definition of "absence" and "unexcused absence" used by those districts.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

WSIPP may consult with employees and data systems of the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and any educational service district or local school district. These entities are required to cooperate with WSIPP.

WSIPP must also survey a geographically representative sample of the courts' actual expenditures in fiscal years 2005 through 2008 to comply with statutory requirements regarding truancy. WSIPP must also include in its study a review of the use of contempt in truancy cases to any barriers to its use. In conducting this survey, WSIPP may consult with employees of, and data systems maintained by, the Administrative Office of the Courts, which must comply with WSIPP's request for information.

WSIPP must report to the Governor and the appropriate legislative committees by December 31, 2008.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS COMMITTEE (Recommended Substitute): WSIPP must include in its study a review of the use of contempt in truancy cases.

Appropriation: Appropriation language is included in the bill but no dollar amount is stated.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill: PRO: The truancy provisions of the Becca bill have been in place for 15 years and the practice around the state is variable, and maybe that's good, and maybe that's bad, but we don't really know. We need to know the impact that the Becca truancy provisions have had. There are a number of districts around the state that are considered to be exemplary, but that is based on anecdotal information. With several privately funded studies going on and the one contemplated in this bill, the Legislature should have the information it needs by the 2009 session to invest its money wisely. It might be a good idea to add the contempt issue to the list that WSIPP must study. The inclusion of the school cost factors for truancy is positive because schools have really been struggling with the funding of the truancy provision.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Bobbe Bridge, Becca Task Force; Debra Axtman, Marysville School District; Kim Ambrose, Washington State Bar Association, Juvenile Law Section; Peggy Brown, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.