

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5219

As Reported by House Committee On: Local Government & Housing

Title: An act relating to housing for populations at risk of being homeless, including those suffering from mental illness, those with criminal backgrounds, and those who may have chemical or alcohol dependency issues.

Brief Description: Establishing a focus group to examine the need to provide housing for certain populations at risk of being homeless.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Human Services & Corrections (originally sponsored by Senators Carrell, Regala, Hargrove, Kline, Brandland, Swecker, Stevens and King).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Local Government & Housing: 3/23/09, 3/26/09 [DPA].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill (As Amended by House)

- Establishes a focus group to examine the need to provide housing for individuals at risk of becoming homeless.
- Requires the focus group report to the Governor and the Legislature by November 15, 2009.
- Authorizes the focus group to use legislative facilities and staff.
- Expires the focus group on December 1, 2009.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT & HOUSING

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Simpson, Chair; Nelson, Vice Chair; Angel, Ranking Minority Member; Cox, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Hinkle, Miloscia, Short, Springer, Upthegrove, White and Williams.

Staff: Ethan Moreno (786-7386)

Background:

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.

Housing Assistance Programs.

The Legislature has funded many programs that provide housing assistance to the homeless, some of which focus on populations who are being released from institutions, have mental health issues, or have chemical dependency problems. These programs include:

- the Reentry Housing Pilot Program, which funds housing and support services for offenders who are under the supervision of the Department of Corrections;
- the Transitional Housing Operating and Rent Program, which helps homeless families transition to permanent housing; and
- the Homeless Grant Assistance Program, which awards grants to counties for projects that reduce homelessness.

Residential Landlord-Tenant Act.

The Residential Landlord-Tenant Act (Act) defines the minimum duties of landlords and tenants of residential dwellings. These laws also impose certain restrictions and provide remedies if one party fails to carry out a duty. The remedies include eviction, reduced rent, and an award of attorneys' fees to the successful party. Landlords and tenants of mobile homes are not subject to the rules of the Act.

Summary of Amended Bill:

A focus group is established to examine the need to provide housing for individuals at risk of becoming homeless including, but not limited to, persons suffering from mental illness, persons with criminal backgrounds, and persons with chemical or alcohol dependency issues.

The focus group must review and make recommendations in a number of issue areas, including:

- identification and removal of barriers to finding and maintaining affordable housing for individuals at risk of being homeless;
- existing programs that provide housing assistance to at-risk populations and advisable methods of providing housing assistance; and
- statutory changes to the Residential Landlord-Tenant Act.

The focus group must invite participation from a number of groups, including:

- legislative members from related committees in the Senate and the House of Representatives;
- certain state agencies;
- crime victims;
- multifamily housing and landlord associations; and
- other interested groups, as appropriate.

By November 15, 2009, the focus group must present a report of its findings and recommendations, as well as any proposed legislation, to the Governor and to the appropriate committees of the Legislature.

The focus group may use legislative facilities. Senate Committee Services and the Office of Program Research must provide staff support. Non-legislative focus group members must serve without compensation, and Legislative members may not be reimbursed for any travel expenses incurred as a result of participation in the group.

Provisions establishing the focus group and prescribing its composition and duties expire on December 1, 2009.

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The amended bill makes the following changes to the Senate bill:

- requires the focus group to invite participation from the Office of Civil Legal Aid.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This bill is part of prison and supervision reform efforts that have been undertaken in recent years with Senator Regala. The Legislature has not sufficiently focused on housing issues for formerly incarcerated individuals. Many discharged persons do not have stable housing, but stable housing is important in avoiding recidivism. The budget is facing tough challenges, but this is an appropriate time to examine federal, state, and local housing policies and policy options, especially when the examination will be at virtually no cost to the state. All will be welcome to participate in the focus group.

This bill focuses on populations that are ignored under other programs and funding sources - these are populations that are unlikely to be helped by housing subsidy programs. If you place people in housing, they are more likely to give up injurious behavior.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Carrell, prime sponsor; Seth Dawson, Washington State Coalition for the Homeless and National Alliance on Mental Illness; and Ruth Sheerar, Senior Lobby.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.