

SENATE BILL REPORT

HB 2904

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Early Learning & K-12 Education, February 24, 2010

Title: An act relating to powers and duties of the office of the education ombudsman.

Brief Description: Concerning the powers and duties of the office of the education ombudsman.

Sponsors: Representatives Kagi, Santos and Kenney.

Brief History: Passed House: 2/10/10, 96-0.

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 2/18/10, 2/22/10, 2/24/10 [DPA].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators McAuliffe, Chair; Kauffman, Vice Chair, Early Learning; Oemig, Vice Chair, K-12; King, Ranking Minority Member; Brandland, Gordon, Hobbs, Holmquist, McDermott, Roach and Tom.

Staff: Juliana Roe (786-7438)

Background: The Office of the Education Ombudsman (OEO) was established in 2006 within the Office of the Governor. The OEO is responsible for providing information to parents, students, and others regarding their rights and responsibilities within the public school system and advocating on behalf of K-12 students.

The OEO's authorizing statutes provide various powers and duties, including: (1) developing parent involvement materials; (2) providing information to students, parents, and the public about the public school system; (3) identifying obstacles to greater parental involvement in schools; (4) recommending strategies for improving the success rates of groups of students with disproportionate academic achievement; and (5) facilitating the resolution of complaints made by parents and students regarding the public school system.

The OEO's operating budget for the 2009-11 biennium is \$1.25 million, with an allocation of 7.5 full-time equivalent staff. The OEO is not currently authorized to seek, accept, or expend private or other public funds.

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.

Summary of Bill (Recommended Amendments): The OEO is authorized to actively seek and accept public and private money and develop private-public partnerships to support the purposes of the OEO. An OEO account is created in which must be deposited any gifts, grants, or endowments from public or private sources that are made for the use or benefit of the OEO. Only the OEO director or the director's designee may authorize expenditures from this account. The OEO must annually report to the Legislature revenues, by source, and expenditures.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION COMMITTEE (Recommended Amendments): The language that allowed the OEO to spend any gifts, grants, or endowments from any source according to their terms is removed.

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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.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill: PRO: This bill provides a simple tweak to the current OEO statute to allow the OEO to seek private funding.

The OEO has materials to support outreach which includes brochures and manuals. These items are expensive to print and to translate. We want to be able to continue to provide this service and to provide it to a broader audience.

The OEO has been incredibly helpful in many situations. The OEO has been able to resolve matters within days that parents, dealing with an issue alone, had been dealing with for months. The OEO helps parents obtain advocates, set up meetings, and facilitate negotiations and clear communication. Many parents wish they had heard of the OEO sooner because the office was so helpful.

Allowing the OEO to obtain money by other means is logical. We all want them to continue to do the great work they have been doing. They provide classes to many to help build better relationships between parents and schools.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Kagi, prime sponsor; Cheryl Ricevuto, OEO; Peggy Johnson, Tamara Crane, citizens; Christie Perkins, Washington State Special Education Coalition.