

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5850

As of February 20, 2009

Title: An act relating to protecting workers from human trafficking violations.

Brief Description: Protecting workers from human trafficking violations.

Sponsors: Senators Kohl-Welles, Swecker, Keiser, Franklin, Kline, Hargrove, Fraser, Tom, Regala, Prentice, McAuliffe and Shin.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Labor, Commerce & Consumer Protection: 2/19/09.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON LABOR, COMMERCE & CONSUMER PROTECTION

Staff: Kathleen Buchli (786-7488)

Background: Trafficking in persons is a crime in the state of Washington. A person is guilty of trafficking if the person recruits, harbors, transports, provides, or obtains by any means a person knowing that force, fraud, or coercion will be used to cause the person to engage in forced labor or involuntary servitude, or if the person benefits financially by participating in a venture that engages in any of these actions.

International matchmaking organizations are required, upon request, to disseminate background check and personal history information of a Washington State resident whose information is provided to a recruit of the organization. Violations of this requirement are considered to be violations of the Consumer Protection Act.

Summary of Bill: International labor recruitment agencies and domestic employers of foreign workers must provide a disclosure statement to foreign workers who have been referred to or hired by a Washington employer. The disclosure statement must be provided in the primary language spoken by the worker; state that the worker may be considered an employee under the laws of the state of Washington; state that the worker may be subject to both state and federal laws governing overtime and work hours; include an itemized listing of any deductions the employer intends to make from the worker's pay for food and housing, including an itemized listing of the international labor recruitment agency's fees; state that the worker has the right to control over his or her travel and labor documents; and include a list of services or a hot line the worker may contact. Violations of the disclosure statement requirement are considered violations of the Consumer Protection Act.

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.

Physicians, psychologists, mental health counselors, marriage and family therapists, and social workers must take a one-time course on human trafficking that teaches methods of recognizing victims of human trafficking, what services are available to these victims, and where to report potential trafficking situations. The course may be taken as part of their mandatory continuing education requirements or as part of their employee orientation training. The course may be developed in collaboration with a local university or college and community organizations with experience in assisting or providing services to victims of human trafficking.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 4, 2009.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The disclosure will help people know that there are labor laws for their protection. The notification and disclosure of worker rights is strongly supported. The people undergoing the ongoing education requirements under the bill work on the point of first contact. Getting them this education will help people who are victims of human trafficking. This state is one of the top places in the country in terms of the laws on trafficking. This bill is the next logical step. This ensures workers have knowledge of their rights and provides training for critical first responders. Trafficking is a very real issue in our state. We know there is a lot more going on than we know about. These are preventative measures, rather than reactionary measures. Police officers and school counselors should be added to the continuing education requirement.

OTHER: There is an unintended loophole in the bill for nonprofits; the requirements are easy enough and should apply to everyone. The disclosure statement should be made here and we should work on a unified form for the disclosure statement. Regarding the consumer protection element, people with H2A and H2B visas should be exempted or a requirement should be added to have the Department of Labor and Industries talk to employers before the consumer protection element is enforced.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Benita Gjurasic, Tronie Foundation; Lonnie Johns-Brown, Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs; Christina Smailes, student, Pacific Lutheran University.

OTHER: Dan Fazio, Washington Farm Bureau.