

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6491

As of January 20, 2010

Title: An act relating to transferring the state school for the blind, the Washington state center for childhood deafness and hearing loss, and the associated boards of trustees to the office of the superintendent of public instruction.

Brief Description: Transferring the state school for the blind and the state center for childhood deafness and hearing loss to the office of the superintendent of public instruction.

Sponsors: Senators Oemig, McAuliffe, Kauffman and Shin; by request of Governor Gregoire.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 1/20/10.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Staff: Juliana Roe (786-7438)

Background: Under current law, the State School for the Blind is under the direction of the superintendent with the advice of the board of trustees. The Governor appoints the superintendent for the School for the Blind. The Governor also appoints the members of the board of trustees. Trustees with voting privileges are appointed by the Governor with the consent of the Senate. The board of trustees must submit a list of three qualified candidates for superintendent to the Governor.

The State School for the Deaf is under the direction of the director, or the director's designee, of the Washington State Center for Childhood Deafness and Hearing Loss (center) and the board of trustees. The Governor appoints the director for the center. The Governor also appoints the board of trustees. The board of trustees must develop a process for recommending candidates for the position of director and upon vacancy must submit a list of three qualified candidates for director to the Governor.

Summary of Bill: The state residential schools: the School for the Blind, the School for the Deaf, and the State Center for Childhood Deafness and Hearing Loss, (which serves local school districts that serve deaf students) become programs under the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. The Superintendent will make all appointments that were formerly made by the Governor and/or Senate.

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.

The director of the center becomes the assistant superintendent of the center.

The superintendent of the State School for the Blind becomes the assistant superintendent of the State School for the Blind.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 15, 2010.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on July 1, 2010.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This is a Governor request bill. The Governor believes that government needs to be organized in this time of fiscal crisis. She has recommended eliminating 78 boards and commissions as well as merging one-third of the 264 small independent state agencies and 24 large agencies. The rest of the agencies will be asked to reduce their budget. Small agencies are not efficient. They need to reduce their costs because it's what the people expect. The Governor believes that the schools for the blind and deaf will continue to do excellent work and reach out to their students if they are housed within OSPI. Having separate schools for the blind and the deaf does not meet the long-term goal. We need to look to the future.

CON: Experience shows that operating in the proposed structure in OSPI would lack flexibility, create purchasing restrictions, and create issues relating to the expenditure of funds. People from all over have relocated to attend the school for the blind. It serves hundreds of students per month. The brail access program has served 13 million people. The assistant technology center offers training for the blind. This school is a national leader in developing accessible online information for blind students. It ranks among the top three in the country, along with schools in Texas and Indiana. In the past two years, Idaho and Virginia have changed their schools' models to mirror that of Washington.

Consolidation does not make sense for this school because of the specialized services provided. OSPI is a pass-through for federal and state dollars that are given to ESDs and local school districts. OSPI has never administered any direct service educational facilities. There has not been a sufficient analysis of the impact this move may have on the services provided. Furthermore, the school and the people who would be effected were not consulted. The school is working well right now, how will moving it into OSPI make it better? If the system works the way it is, then why fix it?

No one with expertise or knowledge regarding deaf children has been involved in deciding what is best for these children. In 2007 we asked the Legislature for interpreters to be available in schools where deaf children attended and the bill passed. However, OSPI has made very few changes with regard to this bill and it has not lived up to our expectations. OSPI has failed to accomplish what we wanted. Therefore, if we are merged into OSPI, there may be a decline in learning for our deaf students. There is a great need for more information.

OTHER: There needs to be more information available because there is a concern that OSPI may not be able to deal with blind and/or deaf students or foster the kind of environment in which they are accustomed as a separate government agency.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Kathleen Drew, Governor's Office.

CON: Steve Rainey, Mike Freeman, Schools for Blind and Deaf; Denice Colley, Burel Colley, Washington Counsel of the Blind; Raymond Batel, citizen; James Christianson, Washington State Association of the Deaf; Larry Petersen, Deaf Community Activist.

OTHER: Representative Jim Moeller.