
Public Safety Committee

HB 2421

Brief Description: Requesting a comprehensive review of staff safety at the department of corrections.

Sponsors: Representatives Schmick, Chandler, Walsh, Fagan, Klippert, Nealey, Short and Freeman.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Office of Financial Management to contract with a consultant to perform a study on staffing ratios and safety assessments in the Department of Corrections facilities.

Hearing Date: 1/31/14

Staff: Yvonne Walker (786-7841).

Background:

The Washington Department of Corrections (DOC) is responsible for administering adult correctional programs operated by the State of Washington and confining those offenders who violate criminal laws. This includes overseeing state correctional institutions and programs for offenders supervised in the community. The DOC currently operates 12 prison facilities including eight major prisons and four minimum-security prisons and is responsible for approximately 17,000 offenders per year.

In 2012 the DOC established five main priorities for its agency:

1. to ensure that staff members are safe in their work environments;
2. to require programs that change offender behavior to break the cycle of crime;
3. to reduce health care costs in the prison system;
4. to get funded prison capacity to safely and effectively manage institutions and include sufficient space for offender programs; and

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.

5. to continue implementing the new community supervision model across the state and expand new services in communities.

In 2011 the DOC submitted a request for the National Institute of Corrections to conduct an independent review of the Monroe Correctional Complex/Washington State Reformatory's policies and procedures relative to the death of a correctional officer (Correctional Officer Jayme Biendl) that occurred on January 29, 2011. The report was completed in March 2011 and identified 15 recommendations regarding changes to the systems, policies, practices, protocols, and technology within that correctional facility. The Legislature subsequently enacted Engrossed Senate Bill 5907 (chapter 242 of the Laws of 2011) which required the DOC to:

- Establish a Statewide Security Advisory Committee to review the agency's security-related policies and procedures.
- Establish multidisciplinary teams at each correctional facility to evaluate offenders' placements in inmate job assignments and custody promotions.
- Develop a training curriculum regarding staff safety issues at correctional facilities in consultation with both the Statewide Security and Local Advisory Committees.
- Hire a consultant to study the feasibility of implementing a statewide system for staff safety, utilizing body alarms and proximity alarms for staff within correctional facilities; and
- Hire a consultant to study and make recommendations on the deployment of video monitoring cameras.

Summary of Bill:

The Office of Financial Management (OFM) must contract with experienced consultants that have the expertise to perform an evidence-based study and progress report of staffing ratios and safety assessments in the DOC facilities. The OFM and the consultants must consult with the DOC, stakeholder groups that represent those who are served in the institutions, labor organizations representing correctional employees working in the institutions, and other entities with experience and expertise in the areas being studied.

As part of the study, the following factors must be considered:

- the number and type of staff at each of the DOC facilities;
- the adequacy and costs of current staffing at the DOC facilities;
- the need, availability, and costs of improving staffing at the DOC facilities;
- the geographic factors associated with staffing the DOC facilities, including the impact of staffing on the local economy and the economic impact of reducing or increasing staffing at the DOC facilities;
- the safety of employees at the DOC facilities, including all reported incidents of all assault or other crimes committed against such employees;
- a detailed review of the adequacy and costs of all current security-related policies, procedures, and measures at the DOC facilities and the need, availability, and costs of improving such policies, procedures, and measures; and
- the implementation and consistent application of policy recommendations resulting from the National Institute of Corrections review of prison safety and the Statewide Security Advisory Committee regarding security issues in the DOC facilities.

The OFM must submit a final report to the Governor and Legislature by December 1, 2014, that must provide: (1) recommendations and a plan, if necessary, to improve staffing ratios and employee safety at the DOC facilities; and (2) an individual assessment of staffing and safety measures at each DOC facility and any costs or savings associated with each recommendation and plan. By December 1, 2015, the OFM must also submit a report on the progress made by the DOC on implementing the recommendations and plan.

The act expires on December 1, 2015.

The "Department of Corrections facilities" means facilities operated by the DOC to house persons convicted of a criminal offense who are in full confinement.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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