

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5150

As of February 17, 2013

Title: An act relating to forming a task force for reform of the state mental health system.

Brief Description: Creating a task force to examine reform of the mental health system.

Sponsors: Senators Carrell, Darneille, Pearson, Kohl-Welles, Tom, Keiser and Conway.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections: 1/29/13.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Staff: Kevin Black (786-7747)

Background: Washington provides publically-funded behavioral health treatment to individuals who qualify for Medicaid and other public programs, and to individuals who access crisis services and forensic services provided through the criminal justice system. Research indicates that behavioral health problems are widespread, with over 50 percent of persons meeting diagnostic criteria for a behavioral health disorder during their lifetimes. National studies estimate, however, that only 38 percent of persons with mental health disorders and 18 percent of persons with substance abuse disorders receive treatment. Persons with behavioral health disorders use emergency room and hospital services at a higher rate than the general population and are at comparatively high risk to experience homelessness, unemployment, and criminal justice system involvement.

Summary of Bill: The Legislature must convene a taskforce to examine reform of the mental health system. The taskforce must consist of:

- one member from each of the two largest caucuses in the Senate and House of Representatives;
- the Secretary of the Department of Social and Health Services or the Secretary's designee;
- a representative of law enforcement;
- a representative of a regional support network;
- a representative of treatment providers; and
- a consumer or family representative.

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The taskforce must undertake a system-wide review of the public mental health system and make recommendations for reform concerning, but not limited to, the following:

- the means by which services are delivered for adults with serious mental illness;
- availability of effective means to promote recovery and prevent harm associated with mental illness;
- crisis services; and
- public safety practices involving persons with mental illnesses with forensic involvement.

The taskforce must report its findings to the Governor and appropriate committees of the Legislature by January 1, 2014.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: Yes.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: We want to bring people together and rethink the entire system. I see this as a bottom-up, not top-down approach. We need everybody's thoughts and participation. Counties with state hospitals, unions, mental health advocates, public defenders, consumers and family members, and the hospital association should be allowed to participate. We support the taskforce, but immediate steps should be taken on staffing and safety. In my 40 years of experience, I have never seen the mental health system as broken as it is right now. More persons with mental illness are in the jails than the hospital, and state hospital patients are being discharged to shelters. Everybody is at risk because the system is so badly fractured. Reducing the impact of incarceration in jails on the mentally ill population should be added as a taskforce goal. The taskforce should review the recommendations from the Mental Health Transformation grant. We need a total health approach including public education and investment in prevention and evidence-based treatments. While most violent acts are not committed by persons with mental illness, it is true that the risk of violence increases the longer that psychoses are not treated.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Carrell, prime sponsor; Jennifer Joly, Pierce County; Seth Dawson, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), NAMI WA; Ann Christian, WA Community Mental Health Council; Abby Murphy, WA Assn. of Counties; Chelene Whiteaker, WA State Hospital Assn.; Mike DeFelice, WA Defender Assn., WA Assn. of Criminal Defense Lawyers; David Lord, Disability Rights WA; Lawrence Thompson, Federation of WA State Employees 793; Mina Lucas, SEIU 1199NW.