

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6281

As of January 29, 2014

Title: An act relating to ensuring an effective hunter education program.

Brief Description: Ensuring an effective hunter education program.

Sponsors: Senators Roach, Pedersen, Benton and Conway.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources & Parks: 1/28/14.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Staff: Richard Rodger (786-7401)

Background: The Washington hunter education program, which is approved by the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW), consists of at least ten hours of instruction in safety, conservation, sportsmanship, and firearm handling. Average classes involve four to six sessions and require the student to pass a written test and, other than students who are in the military, demonstrate firearms handling skills.

The DFW Hunter Education Instructor Policy Manual (manual) provides that instructors are strongly encouraged to include live firing in all courses, but the student's participation is not mandatory. A student who opts out of the live-fire activity must still complete all associated steps using inert ammunition. A student may not be failed for opting out of the live-fire activity.

The manual prohibits students from bringing a personal firearm to any portion of a hunter education course. Any student who uses a personal firearm during a course will fail the course and be asked to leave immediately.

Summary of Bill: A hunter education instructor may, at the instructor's discretion, require a student under the age of 18 to participate in live-fire training. An exception to the live-fire training is allowed if the student provides proof of having previously received a similar or greater level of instruction.

The instructor may also allow a student to use a personal firearm in the course once it has been inspected and approved by the instructor.

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.

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: PRO: This bill promotes safety in hunter education and prevents the attrition of instructors and participants. The bill allows considerable choice between instructors as to whether they would require live-fire practice for use in their class. There is no cost associated with the bill.

CON: This bill would place too much liability on the instructor with regard to allowing students to bring in their own firearms.

OTHER: There is support for the concepts and intent of the bill. However, there is still work that needs to be done on the amendment. The proposed statute changes are already in current policy for the instructors, as they are strongly encouraged to use live-fire training. There are issues surrounding facilities required for live-fire exercises, as well as for people with disabilities who may require specialized equipment, and for felons who are legally forbidden from handling firearms. Students who opt out of live-fire demonstrations must still complete the other requirements of the course. The allowance of personal firearms to be utilized in the course is of great concern.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Roach, prime sponsor.

CON: Mike Iyall, Hunter Education Instructor.

OTHER: David Whipple, DFW, Hunter Education Division Manager; Bob Cromwell, Hunter Education Instructor.