SENATE BILL REPORT
SB 6365

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Financial Institutions, Housing & Insurance, February 6, 2014

Title: An act relating to creating a pilot program to provide educational stability for homeless children.

Brief Description: Creating a pilot program to provide educational stability for homeless children.

Sponsors: Senators Frockt, McAuliffe, O'Ban, Fain, Litzow, Pedersen, Darneille, Rolfes, Kohl-Welles, Tom, Liias and Cleveland.

Brief History:
  Committee Activity: Financial Institutions, Housing & Insurance: 2/04/14, 2/06/14 [DP-WM].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS, HOUSING & INSURANCE

  Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.
    Signed by Senators Angel, Co-Chair; Hobbs, Co-Chair; Benton, Vice Co-Chair; Mullet, Vice Co-Chair; Fain, Hatfield, Nelson and Roach.

  Staff: Alison Mendiola (786-7483)

  Background: The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987, 42 U.S.C. 11431 (Act), is a federal law that ensures immediate enrollment and educational stability for homeless children and youth. The Act provides federal funding to states for the purpose of supporting district programs that serve homeless students. The definition of homeless under this Act includes children or youth in shelters or transitional housing; children or youth living in parks, public spaces, vehicles, abandoned buildings, or other places not meant for people to live; children or youth doubled-up or couch surfing due to loss of housing or economic hardship; children or youth living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or campgrounds due to lack of alternative accommodations; children or youth awaiting foster care; and unaccompanied children or youth, i.e., not in the physical custody of their parents or guardians. Under the Act, a child has the right to remain enrolled in, and be transported to, the child's school of origin when feasible, even if the child moves across or outside the district. School of origin means the school the child last attended when permanently housed, or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled.

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.

According to local school districts, there were approximately 18,000 homeless students in 2011-12.

The Department of Commerce (Commerce) administers housing programs designed specifically to address the needs of low-income and homeless populations.

Summary of Bill: Commerce, in consultation with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), must administer a two-year pilot program that links homeless children and their families with stable housing located in the homeless child's school district. The goal of the pilot program is to provide educational stability of homeless families while also reducing transportation costs for school districts.

Commerce, in consultation with OSPI, must develop a competitive grant process to award a one-time grant of $300,000 to a school district partnered with an eligible organization. Eligible organization means any local government, local housing authority, nonprofit community or neighborhood-based organization, or federally recognized Indian tribe in the state of Washington. Preference must be given to rural school districts and school districts in eastern Washington.

Funds may be used for direct rental assistance, utility or gas assistance for families with vehicles, shelter and related services, and employment and educational opportunities that help the family stay in the child's school district. Families receiving assistance must be a very low-income household, earning less than 50 percent of the area median income, adjusted for household size, for the county where the pilot program is located.

The grantee must keep track of the number of homeless children in the school district, the number of homeless children served by the grant, the types of assistance offered, and the educational transportation costs of the homeless children. This information is reported to Commerce. Commerce must compile this information and report to the Legislature the findings of the grantee, the housing stability of homeless families, whether the school district's transportation costs were reduced during the program period, and any related policy recommendations.

The sum of $300,000 or as much thereof as may be necessary, is appropriated for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2014, from the general fund to Commerce for the purposes of this Act. If this specific funding is not provided, this Act is null and void.

This Act expires January 15, 2017.

Appropriation: $300,000.

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: The inspiration for this bill comes from the successful partnership out of the Tacoma Public Housing Authority and McCarver Elementary School. This bill also relates to another bill which has passed out of the education committee known as the Homeless Children Education Act, spearheaded by students from the University of Washington's (UW's) Student and Child Legislative Advocacy Clinic. The goal is to support homeless children and their families in the school they are in, instead of the family moving across town or out of district. The money spent on the federally required transportation would be better spent on keeping the child and the child's family in the school, and hopefully this pilot would show that the transportation costs actually go down, saving the local school districts money. When children change schools, they lose four to six months of learning. If a child moves twice in a year, a whole year of learning is lost. The change in the class is also disruptive to other children in the classroom.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Frockt, prime sponsor; Connie Brown, Tacoma Pierce County Affordable Housing Consortium; Liz Allen, UW Student, Child Legislative Advocacy Clinic; Nick Federici, WA Low Income Housing Alliance.