

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1436

As Reported by House Committee On:
Early Learning & Human Services

Title: An act relating to homeless youth prevention and protection.

Brief Description: Concerning homeless youth prevention and protection.

Sponsors: Representatives Kagi, Zeiger, Robinson, Walsh, Walkinshaw, Pettigrew, Senn, Johnson, Orwall, Ortiz-Self, Reykdal, Carlyle, Gregerson, Appleton, Fitzgibbon, Ormsby, Clibborn, Jinkins, Bergquist, Goodman, McBride, Pollet, Riccelli and Kilduff; by request of Governor Inslee.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Early Learning & Human Services: 2/4/15, 2/10/15 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Creates an Office of Homeless Youth Programs (Office) within the Department of Commerce.
- Requires the Office to lead efforts to coordinate a spectrum of funding, policy, and practice efforts related to homeless youth with a focus on four stated service priorities: (1) stable housing; (2) education and employment; (3) permanent connections; and (4) social and emotional well-being.
- Authorizes the Office to provide the management and oversight of HOPE Centers, Crisis Residential Centers, street youth services, and Independent Youth Housing Programs.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & HUMAN SERVICES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Walkinshaw, Vice Chair; Kilduff, Ortiz-Self, Sawyer and Senn.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Scott, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Dent, Hawkins and McCaslin.

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.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Walsh, Ranking Minority Member.

Staff: Ashley Paintner (786-7120).

Background:

Programs for Street and Homeless Youth.

The Children's Administration of the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) administers a number of programs regarding the care of street and homeless youth such as HOPE Centers and Crisis Residential Centers (CRCs).

HOPE Centers. In 1999 the state Legislature passed the HOPE Act, which created HOPE Centers. HOPE Centers provide temporary residential placements for street youth under the age of 18. Youth may self-refer to a HOPE Center for services and entering a center is voluntary. While residing in a HOPE Center, youth undergo a comprehensive assessment in order to develop the best plan for the youth. The assessment includes gathering information on the youth's legal status, and conducting a physical examination, a mental health and chemical abuse evaluation, and an educational evaluation of their basic skills, along with any learning disabilities or special needs. The plan will focus on finding a permanent and stable home for the youth.

Crisis Residential Centers. Crisis Residential Centers are short-term, semi-secure facilities for runaway youth and adolescents in conflict with their families. Youth cannot remain in a CRC more than 15 consecutive days. Counselors at a CRC work with the family to resolve the immediate conflict and develop better ways of dealing with the conflict in the future. The stated goal of CRCs is to reunite the family and youth wherever possible. In 1995 Washington implemented policies for at-risk youth intended to protect children and help families reconcile. The "Becca Bill" established Secure Crisis Residential Centers (SCRCs) and authorized law enforcement to pick up runaway youth or youth found in dangerous circumstances and place them in a SCRC.

Other Youth Housing Programs.

Independent Youth Housing Program (IYHP). The Department of Commerce (COM) operates the IYHP, which provides rental assistance and case management for eligible youth who have aged out of the state foster care system. These funds are intended to assist in meeting the state goal of ensuring that all such youth avoid experiencing homelessness by having access to decent, appropriate, and affordable homes in a healthy and safe environment.

Home Security Fund.

Both the state and county homeless housing programs receive funding through a local homeless housing and assistance surcharge. The surcharge is \$40 per recorded document and applies to certain documents relating to real property specified in statute. The state's share is deposited into the Home Security Fund. The COM uses these funds for a number of homeless housing programs, with at least 45 percent of the state's share set aside for the use of private rental housing payments.

Homeless Families Services Fund.

The Homeless Families Services Fund is in the custody of the State Treasurer and the COM may expend monies from the fund to provide state matched funds for housing-supportive services for homeless families.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The Office of Homeless Youth Programs (Office) is created within the COM and must be operational no later than January 1, 2016. The Office is responsible for leading efforts to coordinate a spectrum of funding, policy, and practice efforts related to homeless youth with a stated goal of preventing state systems from discharging youth and young adults into homelessness. There are four stated priority service areas: (1) stable housing; (2) education and employment; (3) permanent connections; and (4) social and emotional well-being. The Office shall address practice gaps within the state system among these four priority service areas. Regular consultation must occur between the Office and an advisory committee comprised of advocates, service providers, and other stakeholders knowledgeable in the provision of services to homeless youth and young adults.

The Office is authorized to provide the management and oversight of HOPE Centers, CRCs, street youth services, and IYHPs. The CRCs must record client information into a homeless management information system specified by the COM. By December 1, 2016, the Office must submit a report to the Governor to inform recommendations for funding, policy, and best practices in the four priority service areas. Additionally, the Homeless Families Services Fund is renamed the Washington Youth and Families Fund.

Definitions are provided for the following: child, juvenile, youth, and minor; homeless; homeless youth; runaway; street youth; unaccompanied; young adult; administrator; child in need of services petition; crisis residential center; HOPE center; secure facility; semi-secure facility; and staff secure facility.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill removes the staff to child ratio requirement for CRCs with semi-secure facilities. Additionally, it removes the time frame requirement for the state matched funds to be used in the Washington Youth and Families Fund. The substitute bill also clarifies that the DSHS is responsible for authorizing a street youth's temporary placement in a HOPE Center.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Currently there is no office of youth homelessness in the State of Washington. In the early learning area, the state used to have programs scattered across many state agencies dealing with child care and preschool. It wasn't until the state pulled all those programs together under the Department of Early Learning that they were able to make significant strides forward with a focused strategy. At the highest level, House Bill 1436 does four things: (1) it sets a goal that the state is not going to discharge youth from state systems into homelessness; (2) it puts someone in charge of getting the state to that goal; (3) it requires the Office to create a roadmap on how the state will get to that goal; and (4) it reorganizes and opens up some programs to address youth homelessness.

There are over 30,000 students in Washington who are without permanent housing. There is a real need for action here. Everyone deserves a safe place to call home and no one wants to be homeless. Youth become homeless for several reasons. Some young people have been forced out of their home due to economic reasons and many have emancipated out of the foster system into homelessness. Others have become homeless due to chemical dependency or mental health issues, some are still children and have children of their own and are trying to live on the streets. Many of these young people had to leave abusive homes for their own safety. No one wants to be homeless. It's important that we get rid of the myth that youth want to live on the streets. There are scores of dedicated professionals who work to get these young people out of homelessness. These programs are stretched for resources. The state needs a system to make homelessness for young people rare, brief, and one time. Each young person has their unique experience that led them to homelessness. No one can attempt to understand what it is like to walk in their shoes. We all have a shared moral interest in their goals to become productive members of the community. If the state continues to allow youth homelessness, it is shameful and unjust. Together we can all collaborate to make Washington a safe and healthy place for everyone to call home.

The Raikes Foundation is a private philanthropy-based foundation in Seattle. Since 2011 the Raikes Foundation has been combating youth homelessness in King County. The Raikes Foundation has found that young people experiencing youth homelessness are not that different from your children or mine. These young people are full of dreams and tremendous potential. Unleashing their potential for our community requires systemic change that can only happen when the public and private sectors collaborate under strong leadership with shared outcomes. In King County this private and public effort has helped to fuel system enhancements, it has informed a comprehensive plan to prevent and end youth homelessness in King County, and it has also attracted more than \$5 million additional dollars to the cause. The Homeless Youth Act would enable similar progress for homeless young people across the state. It will help to maximize philanthropic and tax payer dollars. This issue is not confined by county lines. We know that there are homeless youth in every zip code in Washington. It is a statewide challenge that requires a statewide response. House Bill 1436 would build on the foundation and elements that have been established to reduce youth homelessness in King County and expand these efforts statewide.

The COM supports the notion that by combining programs and focusing efforts, the state will be able to accomplish specified goals and make progress. House Bill 1436 does just that. The COM is the statutory agency responsible for housing and homelessness and carries out

those duties through a number of contractors throughout the state that work in the communities. The COM provides housing for individuals involved in a number of different systems. The COM focuses on providing the housing so the barriers to self-sufficiency can be addressed. One of the recent examples on how the COM uses this system to integrate components is their partnership with the DSHS working with individuals in need of housing who are receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families benefits. One of the greatest outcomes from this collaboration was that the DSHS system is now accessible in all of the homeless offices throughout the state.

One of the things to note is that the COM administers \$113 million dollars in homeless housing funding per biennium. The amount of administration that will go into the Homeless Youth Act is 5 percent. Many programs use over 5 percent for administrative costs. The COM is able to do this work at a lower rate given their established connections and collaborations throughout the state. Dealing with homelessness requires experienced staff. If the COM is going to do a state plan on youth homelessness, it will take some time and money to do it properly. The fiscal note represents our desire to pay attention to this very important work. The focus of the COM on youth homelessness will allow the state to see the same kind of success with youth homelessness that the state has seen with the adult homeless population in past years.

From the perspective of the DSHS, the COM is really the homeless agency and the DSHS is not. By way of background, the CRCs were created in 1979, the SCRCs in 1995 when the Becca Bill passed, and HOPE beds were created several years later. The utilization of these services has significantly declined over the past few years. This bill directs these resources that are already out there and allows them to be used more efficiently and effectively. For example, the Spokane CRC has 8 beds and the utilization rate is at 33 percent. House Bill 1436 allows these current facilities to focus on a different population, which the DSHS supports. The DSHS reaches out to the local police departments to inform them on the existence of these services. However, it appears that some local police are still unaware of the services. Another issue is that there are legislative restrictions on the use of these beds, and House Bill 1436 loosens those restrictions up so the beds can be used for a broader range of youth. House Bill 1436 will dovetail off of the work that the DSHS has done and the contracts with providers they already have established.

Building Changes is a non-profit organization that is working statewide to make homeless rare, brief, and one time. The Youth and Families Fund has just celebrated its tenth anniversary. The \$17 million dollars that the state has invested over the past 10 years has leveraged more than \$38.5 million dollars in contributions from private investors. The Youth and Families Fund has funded over 81 organizations in 21 different counties. Since 2006 the state has seen a 35 percent reduction of family homelessness in Washington. It is now time to apply that same focus to address youth homelessness.

Seattle currently provides the majority of services that exist in the state for youth who are homeless; however, it is often safer for homeless youth to live in other parts of King County or the state. If these resources were available in other locations, youth may find stable housing earlier or it may prevent the youth from becoming homeless at all. By providing stable housing, education, and employment, House Bill 1436 will give youth the resources to get out of their current situation and rise above their dreams. By focusing on social and

emotional well-being, House Bill 1436 will be more than just ending homelessness, it will also be about rehabilitating and reunifying youth with society. By focusing on permanent connections, the bill will lower the number of homeless youth and adults in the state and gain tax payers and voters. Each individual has their own unique story that led them to their homeless situation. With House Bill 1436 the state can successfully avoid more costly outcomes in the criminal justice system, human trafficking, long-term dependence on public benefits, and chronic adult homelessness.

The Washington Coalition for Homeless Youth Advocacy (WACHYA) is a statewide advocacy coalition of over 40 organizations, mainly of providers who provide the services to homeless youth in Washington. House Bill 1436 elevates the issue of young people experiencing homelessness to the state level. Currently, we have individual providers in local jurisdictions combating youth homelessness on their own. Too many communities are not able to support these homeless youth, especially while the state is experiencing an increase in youth who are homeless. By creating the Office within the COM, the state will see an increase in utilization by youth whose families are not yet in the child welfare system. Children should not have to run from their home community to Seattle just to secure a safe bed. Families should not have to lose their teenager to the streets or foster care just to get families in conflict access to state services. The Homeless Youth Act is a rare, brief, and one time opportunity to come together to end youth homelessness.

Cocoon House is a member of the WACHYA. Cocoon House is a non-profit organization that serves at-risk and homeless youth between the ages of 12 to 24 years and their families in Snohomish County through housing, outreach, and prevention services. Cocoon House has been serving Snohomish County since 1991. Recently, Cocoon House has been seeing an increase in the number of youth who have been experiencing homelessness, especially in the rural communities. Having an Office will strengthen and focus the efforts to end and prevent youth homelessness.

Youth Care is also a member of WACHYA. Youth Care is an organization that has been helping homeless youth in Seattle since 1974. Last year nearly 1,400 homeless youth and adults walked into the Youth Care drop-in center looking for services. Youth on the streets can fall victim to drugs and alcohol, sexual exploitation, and violence. It takes a continuum of coordinated services across the state in order to help young people move forward. House Bill 1436 creates the Office of Homeless Youth to provide these coordinated services across the state.

The Reach Center provides education, employment, and housing services to youth between the ages of 16 to 24 years in Tacoma and Pierce County. Just a few weeks ago, the Reach Center received a contract from Pierce County to provide youth and young adult homeless shelters, which has never been done before in Pierce County. Currently, King County and Thurston County serve these young people. According to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, there were 3,011 homeless students in Pierce County schools in the 2012-13 school year. Shelter, outreach, and drop-in services are critical to help youth to obtain stable housing and provide a safety-net to reduce the risk of harm. House Bill 1436 provides support to Pierce County and counties throughout the state in addressing youth homelessness.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Kagi, prime sponsor; Andi Smith and Trudi Inslee, Office of the Governor; Tricia Raikes, Raikes Foundation; Dan McConnon, Department of Commerce; Jennifer Strus, Department of Social and Health Services; Robin Koskey, Building Changes; Trai Williams, Christopher Atkins, and Jim Theofelis, The Mockingbird Society; Julio Cortes, Cocoon House; Liz Trautman, Youth Care; and Kurt Miller, REACH Center and Pierce County Community Youth Services.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.