

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2113

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

Title: An act relating to creating a legislative task force on poverty.

Brief Description: Creating a task force on poverty.

Sponsors: Representatives Walkinshaw, Walsh, Kagi, Johnson, Appleton, Sawyer, Kilduff, Stanford, Jinkins, Zeiger, Santos, Ortiz-Self, Pollet and Ormsby.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Early Learning & Human Services: 2/18/15, 2/20/15 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Establishes a Legislative task force on poverty.
- Requires the task force to develop a comprehensive plan for more effective and efficient poverty relief solutions through identification of pathways out of poverty.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & HUMAN SERVICES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Walkinshaw, Vice Chair; Walsh, Ranking Minority Member; Scott, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Dent, Hawkins, Kilduff, McCaslin, Ortiz-Self, Sawyer and Senn.

Staff: Ashley Paintner (786-7120).

Background:

The Department of Social and Health Services reports that nearly one out of every four Washington residents turns to the Economic Services Administration (ESA) for assistance with cash, food, child support, child care, disability determination, transition to employment, and other services. The ESA's core services include: poverty reduction and self-sufficiency, child support enforcement and financial recovery, and disability determination. The ESA is

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tasked with helping low-income people meet their basic needs and achieve economic independence through cash grants, food, and medical assistance; employment-focused services; and subsidized child care. Major programs include: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and WorkFirst (Washington's Welfare to Work program); Basic Food (formerly the Food Stamp Program); Aged, Blind, or Disabled; Pregnant Women's Assistance; Refugee Cash Assistance; Working Connections Child Care; and medical assistance.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

A Legislative task force on poverty is created. The task force must develop a comprehensive plan for more effective and efficient poverty relief solutions through identification of pathways out of poverty. The plan must establish goals and outcome measures and address system change, funding barriers, and the individualized approach to poverty relief. The task force is to meet on a quarterly basis. The task force must provide a report on its initial findings to the Legislature by December 1, 2015, and the final report is due December 1, 2016.

Membership of the task forces includes:

- two members appointed by the President of the Senate from each of the two largest caucuses in the Senate;
- two members appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives from each of the two largest caucuses in the House of Representatives; and
- eleven members appointed jointly by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives from nonprofit and for-profit private sector interests with extensive knowledge in serving persons living in poverty.

The task force must choose an executive committee to lead the task force and may appoint subcommittees.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill adds the stated finding that poverty occurs statewide in rural, suburban, and urban areas and it has only increased since the great recession of 2007. The poverty task force must be made up of 11 members representing a statewide cross-section of leaders in different roles in the private, non-profit, and public sectors.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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) As the economy has rebounded, it has not rebounded for everyone. This bill creates a task force to look at the issue of poverty in a structured way that allows for a systemic discussion on how to address poverty. It will provide a meaningful forum to discuss the wide breadth of issues that impact poverty across the state of Washington.

The gap between the haves and have nots continues to get wider as poverty rises in the state of Washington. Forty-five percent of African Americans live in a neighborhood concentrated in poverty. Now is the time for the state to be a change agent to move communities beyond poverty. This bill will allow the state to have a quality panel of people to advise the Legislature on ways to address poverty beyond the silos that currently exist.

In the past few decades the state has spent billions of dollars trying to address poverty. However, the numbers continue to move in the wrong direction, especially for black communities. The 2010 census data demonstrates that more people are living in poverty now than ever before in Washington. This issue requires that the Legislature be specific and use intentionality in funding in order to effectively address poverty. Funding should be targeted at communities that are in the most need. Currently, the voices of the people in the black community are not being heard. These voices have not been invited to the table to discuss what is needed to address the issues of poverty. The funding must be done in a way that is respectful to the cultures that you are trying to impact.

The lack of adequate income to get the basic necessities needed in life is at the root of the problems the state is seeing today around poverty. In the state of Washington, the achievement gap has not changed in the past 20 to 30 years. Washington is actually one of the few states where the gap is getting larger, and one of three states where poverty is increasing. Currently, the single best predictor of whether a child will succeed is their zip code. A child growing up in a neighborhood concentrated in poverty often has to deal with inadequate housing, an unsafe environment, and concerns about where their next meal will come from. The social determinants of health demonstrate that health is only slightly correlated with the quality of health care but is far more associated with income, housing, environment, and other determinants. The state needs a comprehensive look across these determinants on better ways to address poverty.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Walkinshaw, prime sponsor; Phyllis Guterrez Kenney, Sea Mar Community Health Centers; Michael Reichert, Catholic Community Services of Western Washington; Evelyn Allen, Washington Housing Equity Alliance; Tony Lee, Poverty Action Network; and Merrit Mount, Washington State Community Action.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.