

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5065

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Early Learning & K-12 Education, February 12, 2015

Title: An act relating to improving educational outcomes for homeless students through increased in-school guidance supports, housing stability, and identification services.

Brief Description: Improving educational outcomes for homeless students through increased in-school guidance supports, housing stability, and identification services.

Sponsors: Senators Frockt, Liias, McCoy, Jayapal, Keiser, Litzow, Pedersen, Darneille, McAuliffe, Hasegawa, Ranker, Billig, Kohl-Welles and Fain.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 1/20/15, 2/12/15 [DPS-WM, w/oRec].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5065 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Litzow, Chair; Dammeier, Vice Chair; Billig, Fain, Rivers and Rolfes.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senators McAuliffe, Ranking Member; Mullet.

Staff: Susan Mielke (786-7422)

Background: The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act is a federal law that provides federal grant funding to states for the purpose of supporting school districts to serve homeless students. It defines homeless children as "individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence." Under the Act, school districts are required to designate a homeless student education liaison to ensure that homeless children and youth are identified and served. The liaison must provide public notice to homeless families – in the community and at school, and facilitate access to school services including transportation. School districts are also required to annually report data regarding homeless students to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). According to the OSPI website, Washington receives approximately \$950,000 in funding each year under the Act.

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.

In 2014 the Legislature passed legislation requiring school districts and OSPI to report specified data on homeless students. Additionally the legislation directed OSPI to distribute best practices for choosing and training school district-designated homeless student liaisons, and to develop or acquire a short video that provides information on how to identify signs that indicate a student may be homeless.

The Department of Commerce (Commerce) administers housing programs designed specifically to address the needs of low-income and homeless populations. The Washington Homeless Client Management Information System is implemented by Commerce for the ongoing collection of information about all homeless individuals in the state. The information comes from the Washington homeless census and from state agencies and community organizations providing services to homeless individuals and families.

Summary of Bill (Recommended Substitute): OSPI must create a competitive grant process to evaluate and award state-funded three-year grants to school districts to increase identification of homeless students and the capacity of the districts to provide support for homeless students, which may include education liaisons. The process must minimize OSPI overhead and administrative costs. The state grant award criteria must be based on the demonstrated need of the school districts, the ability of the district to meet the need, and the quality of the applications submitted. A definition of homeless students, which is the same as the federal definition, is provided. School districts may not use the state grant funds to supplant existing federal, state, or local resources for homeless student supports. School districts may access both federal and state funding to identify and support homeless students.

The list of data on homeless students on which OSPI must report is expanded to add the number of identified unaccompanied homeless students enrolled in public schools. A definition of unaccompanied homeless student is provided.

Commerce in consultation with OSPI must develop and administer a competitive grant program. The stated goal of the grant program is to provide educational stability for homeless students by promoting housing stability. Up to 15 grants of up to \$500,000 each may be awarded each school year to school districts that partner with an eligible organization – a local government, local housing authority, regional support network, nonprofit community or neighborhood-based organization, federally recognized Indian tribe, or regional or statewide nonprofit housing assistance organization. Preference must be given to school districts with a demonstrated commitment of partnership and history with eligible organizations. The grant funds may be used for, but not limited to, rent assistance, transportation assistance, emergency shelter, and housing stability case management. All grant recipients must be from very low-income households, which is defined as a family or unrelated persons living together whose adjusted income is less than 50 percent of the median family income for the county where the grant recipient is located. Grantee school districts must collect specified data and report it to the Legislature. Data on all program participants must be entered into the Washington Homeless Client Management Information System. OSPI must monitor the programs, including specified components, at least once every two years beginning in the 2015-16 school year. If specific funding for the housing assistance program is not provided in the Omnibus Appropriations Act then the provisions addressing the housing assistance program are null and void.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION COMMITTEE (Recommended Substitute): Changes outcomes to opportunities in the intent section and aligns the intent language with the changes in the proposed substitute. Removes sections that provided for homeless student liaisons through the basic education prototypical school funding formula. Creates a state grant program with an appropriation of \$1 million for each year of the 2015-17 biennium. Maintains the housing assistance program for homeless families with homeless students with the null and void clause. Maintains the reporting requirement on unaccompanied homeless students by school districts and OSPI.

Appropriation: \$1 million GFS to OSPI for the grants in section 2 in FY 2016; and \$1 million GFS to OSPI for the grants in section 2 in FY 2017.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed, except section 3 which takes effect September 1, 2018.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill: PRO: The OSPI report that resulted from last year's legislation finds that there is a 56 percent increase in homeless students in the last few years. When your life is unstable due to homelessness there are often additional issues that make your life unstable and it makes attending school very difficult. Without the liaisons, homeless students live in the shadows and do not receive the services that they need to be successful in school. If we target funding to help homeless students in school with liaisons and assist them with housing then we can improve these students' outcomes and this should be part of basic education. The housing assistance program is modeled on the successful McCarver program in Tacoma and there is a similar program that successfully partners Highline School District and the King County Housing Authority. By providing housing assistance for homeless students within their school district then this will save money for school districts that must provide for student transportation.

OTHER: The bill provides funding on the number of homeless students and not the percentage. This strongly favors large districts with a low percentage of homeless students at the expense of small districts with high percentages of homeless students. If there is confusion about whether this should be basic education then that should be clarified that schools must provide these services. We are concerned about the funding implications in light of the *McCleary* funding requirements. Guidance counselors are spending more of their time trying to meet the basic education needs of the homeless students. If you don't fund this then it is an unfunded mandate. We recommend the state fund the high-poverty K-3 class size reduction and all-day kindergarten already in the prototypical schools allocation model instead of requiring schools to spend the funding in a specific way because school districts need to be able to make the decisions that make the best sense for their communities.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Frockt, prime sponsor; Pamela Kinnaird, Shoreline School District; Brenda Hirschi, Shelton School District Board member; Michael Mirra, Tacoma Housing Authority; Dave Larson, Tukwila School District; Sarah Greenwell, Olympia School District, Homeless Liaison; Katara Jordan, Columbia Legal Services; Megan

Hyla, King County Housing Authority; Lydia Sanders, Battle Ground Public Schools; Laurel Kirbawy-Grenfell, YWCA Children's Advocate, School Liaison; Dan McGrady, PEMCO Insurance; Denny Eliason, WA Bankers Assn.; Julia Suliman, State Board of Education; Brandy Sincyr, citizen.

OTHER: Jerry Bender, Assn. of WA School Principals; Lucinda Young, WA Education Assn.; Deb Merle, WA State School Directors' Assn.