

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5404

As of February 4, 2015

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

Brief Description: Concerning homeless youth prevention and protection.

Sponsors: Senators O'Ban, Darneille, Frockt, Miloscia, Kohl-Welles, McAuliffe, Chase, Pedersen and Conway; by request of Governor Inslee.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services, Mental Health & Housing: 1/29/15.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES, MENTAL HEALTH & HOUSING

Staff: Alison Mendiola (786-7444)

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. For example, there are the following:

- *HOPE Centers.* Hope Centers provide temporary residential placements for street youth under the age of 18. These are homeless youth living on the street or other unsafe locations. Youth may self-refer to a HOPE Center for services. Payment for a HOPE Center bed does not require prior approval and entering a HOPE Center is voluntary. While residing in a HOPE Center, each youth will undergo a comprehensive assessment to include the youth's legal status, 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 purpose of the assessment is to develop the best plan for the youth. The plan will focus on finding a permanent and stable home for the youth. This plan might include reunifying the youth with the youth's parent(s) or legal guardian and/or getting the youth into a transitional living situation and off the streets; and
- *Crisis Residential Centers (CRC).* CRCs 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, typically in collaboration with a social worker, work with the family to resolve the immediate conflict. Counselors will also help the youth and family develop better ways of dealing with conflict in the future. The goal is to reunite the family and youth wherever possible. The family will also be referred for additional services if other

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needs are identified. A semi-secure facility is a CRC, or specialized foster family home, operated in a way to reasonably assure that youth placed there will not run away. A secure facility is a CRC center that has locking doors, locking windows, or a secured perimeter, designed and operated to prevent a child from leaving without permission of the facility staff.

The Department of Commerce (Commerce) operates the Independent Youth Housing Program by providing 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 a decent, appropriate, and affordable homes in a healthy, safe environment. Participating youth must meet the following criteria to be eligible for assistance: participants must be at least 18 years of age, must have been a dependent of the state at any time during the four-month period preceding the youth's eighteenth birthday, and must have not yet reached the age of 23. Priority must be given to individuals who were dependents of the state for at least one year.

Home Security Fund. There is a \$40 document recording fee surcharge. The revenue generated supports homeless housing and assistance programs, and the revenue is shared between the county that collected the revenue and the state. The state's share is deposited into the Home Security Fund. Commerce uses these monies to fund 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. This fund exists within the custody of the State Treasurer and includes a one-time appropriation by the Legislature, private contributions, and all other sources deposited into the fund. Commerce may expend monies from the fund to provide state matching funds for housing-based supportive services for homeless families over a period of at least ten years.

Summary of Bill: To successfully reduce and prevent youth and young adult homelessness, it is the goal of the Legislature to provide these youth and young adults with stable housing, education and employment, permanent connections, and social and emotional wellbeing. The Legislature finds that the coordination of statewide homeless prevention and reduction efforts should be the responsibility of the executive branch.

The Office of Homeless Youth Programs (Office) is created, within Commerce. The Office must provide management and oversight of HOPE Centers, crisis residential centers, street youth services, and independent youth housing programs. The Office also gathers data and outcome measures, initiates data sharing agreements, develops specific recommendations and timelines to address funding, policy, and practice gaps with the state system, and increases system integration and coordinates efforts to prevent state systems from discharging youth and young adults into homelessness. An advisory committee must consult with the Office regarding funding, policy, and practice gaps within and among state programs. The Office must be operational no later than January 1, 2016. By December 1, 2016, the Office must submit a report to the Governor to inform and provide recommendations regarding funding, policy, and best practices in the four service areas identified.

Other changes made by the Homeless Youth Act include the following:

- Regarding HOPE Centers: Commerce must establish HOPE Centers and DSHS licenses them. HOPE Centers notify DSHS when a street youth do not promptly return and DSHS notifies the youth's parents. Before dependent children can stay at a HOPE Center, prior approval by DSHS is necessary;
- Regarding CRCs: CRCs must record client information into a homeless management information system specified by Commerce. CRCs must notify DSHS if a child leaves without authorization;
- The Home Security Funds appropriated to carry out the enumerated homeless youth activities are not subject to the 45 percent set aside for the use of private rental housing payments; and
- The Homeless Families Services Fund is renamed the Washington Youth and Families Fund. Revenue can include appropriations from the Legislature in addition to private contributions, and all other sources in the fund. Commerce may expend monies from the fund to provide state matching funds for housing-based supportive services for homeless youth and families over a period of up to ten years.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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: Everyone deserves a place to call home, no one wants to be homeless. People are homeless for economic reasons, mental health issues, or substance abuse. Homelessness should be a rare, brief, and one-time experience. The homeless are no different than anyone else. Homelessness occurs in all corners of Washington and therefore we need a statewide response. The bill moves programs from DSHS to Commerce which makes sense since Commerce provides housing for a wide variety of individuals. Commerce will collaborate with other systems, which results in better outcomes. Moving the programs will take advantage of efficiencies Commerce has developed with contracts, and make it more streamlined and easier for providers to administer the funds. Homeless and formerly homeless youth had a voice in drafting this bill. This bill prevents exiting the system and becoming homeless.

Persons Testifying: PRO: First Lady Trudi Inslee; Kurt Miller, Resources for Education and Career Help Center Director; Tricia Raikes, Raikes Foundation; Andi Smith, Governor's Office; Jennifer Strus, DSHS; Dan McConnon, Commerce; Jim Theofelis, Shallamar Campbell, Clayton Hefley, Mockingbird Society; Alice Shobe, Nancy Osborn, Julio Cortes, Alan Willoughby, citizens.