

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5932

As of February 11, 2015

Title: An act relating to creating the office of homeless youth prevention programs in the department of social and health services.

Brief Description: Creating the office of homeless youth prevention programs.

Sponsors: Senator Miloscia.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services, Mental Health & Housing: 2/12/15.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES, MENTAL HEALTH & HOUSING

Staff: Alison Mendiola (786-7444)

Background: Programs for 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.

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 including 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 focuses on finding a permanent and stable home for the youth. This plan might include reunifying the youth with the youth's parent or parents, legal guardian, and/or getting the youth into a transitional living situation and off the streets.

Crisis Residential Centers (CRCs). CRCs are short-term, semi-secure facilities for runaway youth and adolescents in conflict with their families. Youth cannot remain in a CRC for 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 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

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additional services if other 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.

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. The Department of Commerce (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.

Joint Legislative Audit Review Committee (JLARC). JLARC works to make state government operations more effective, efficient, and accountable. JLARC is comprised of an equal number of House and Senate members, Democrats and Republicans. JLARC pursues its mission by conducting performance audits, program evaluations, sunset reviews, and other analyses. Assignments to conduct studies are made by the Legislature and JLARC itself. Based on these assignments, JLARC's nonpartisan staff auditors, under the direction of the Legislative Auditor, independently seek answers to audit questions and issue recommendations to improve performance.

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.

Child Abuse or Neglect. Abuse or neglect means sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or injury of a child by any person under circumstances which cause harm to the child's health, welfare, or safety, excluding conduct permitted under RCW 9A.16.100; or the negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child by a person responsible for or providing care to the child. An abused child is a child who has been subject to child abuse or neglect as defined in this section.

Mandatory reporters include, among others, the following: law enforcement officers, professional school personnel, registered or licensed nurses, social service counselors, psychologists, pharmacists, DSHS employees, juvenile probation officers, responsible living skills program staff, and HOPE center staff. If a mandatory reporter has reasonable cause to believe that a child has suffered abuse or neglect, the mandatory reporter must report such incident, or cause a report to be made, to the proper law enforcement agency or to Child Protective Services (CPS).

Summary of Bill: The Legislature finds that to successfully reduce and prevent youth homelessness, it is the goal of the Legislature to provide a safe and healthy place for homeless youth to sleep each night while family reconciliation occurs. The goal of the Office of Homeless Youth Prevention Programs is to house all homeless youth located in Washington State within one year. Furthermore, it is the goal of the Legislature that all the citizens of the state work together with law enforcement, public employees, and youth

service providers to eliminate youth homelessness and increase family reunification by immediately picking up all homeless or runaway youth. This legislation may be referred to as the Homeless Youth Prevention Act.

The Office of Homeless Youth Prevention Programs. The Office of Homeless Youth Prevention Programs (Office) is created within DSHS. The Office must provide management and oversight of HOPE Centers, crisis residential centers, and street youth services. The measurable goals of the Office are to each year: (1) reduce the number of new homeless and runaway youth to zero in ten years, (2) decrease the existing number of homeless youth, (3) measurably increase family reconciliation rates, and (4) decrease youth homelessness to zero.

An advisory committee comprised of legislators, parent advocates, service providers, and other stakeholders knowledgeable in the provision of services to homeless youth, 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. The advisory committee must have its initial meeting by March 1, 2016. Beginning March 1, 2016, and quarterly thereafter, the Office must report to the Legislature on the status of its goals. By December 1, 2016, the Office must submit a report to the Governor and Legislature to inform and provide recommendations regarding funding, policy, and best practices preventing homelessness and reconciling homeless youth with their families.

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

- Regarding CRCs: CRCs must record client information into a homeless management information system specified by DSHS;
- 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. DSHS 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.

JLARC. JLARC must conduct a review of state-funded programs that serve unaccompanied youth to determine what performance measures exist, what statutory reporting requirements exist, and whether there is any reliable data on ages of youth served, length of stay, and effectiveness of program exit and reentry.

Homeless Youth Alert Database. A Washington State homeless youth database is established identifying all homeless or runaway youth in order to assist the public in identifying homeless youth and notifying law enforcement and CPS to provide emergency shelter to the homeless youth and to contact the homeless youth's parents or guardians.

Child Abuse or Neglect. The definition of abuse or neglect is amended. A neglected child includes an unaccompanied homeless youth because of the harm to the youth's health, welfare, and safety. Mandatory reporters must report unaccompanied homeless youth and CPS must provide services accordingly.

Department of Commerce. As part of its homeless reporting requirements, Commerce must include the amount expended on and number of services provided to unaccompanied homeless youth.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 9, 2015.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.