

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6518

As of February 4, 2016

Title: An act relating to creating a department of housing.

Brief Description: Creating a department of housing.

Sponsors: Senators Miloscia, Jayapal and Chase.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services, Mental Health & Housing: 2/02/16.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES, MENTAL HEALTH & HOUSING

Staff: Alison Mendiola (786-7444)

Background: The Department of Commerce (Commerce) is a state agency with more than 100 programs that address a wide range of community and economic development objectives. In relation to housing, Commerce provides local governments, nonprofits, and community action agencies with the tools they need to ensure that everyone is housed in their communities. Commerce's work ranges from capital programs for increasing affordable housing stock to programs that prevent families from becoming homeless. Some specific housing programs within Commerce include the Foreclosure Fairness Program, various homeless programs, the Housing Trust Fund, the Weatherization Program, and the Office of Homeless Youth.

Summary of Bill: The Department of Housing (Department) is created. The mission of the Department is to ensure affordable housing for all economic segments and to end homelessness for every citizen.

The director of the Department is to be appointed by the Governor with the consent of the Senate.

All powers, duties, functions, appropriations, tangible property, funds, and other assets that pertain to housing, including the homeless, are transferred from Commerce to the Department. All employees of Commerce engaged in performing the powers, functions, and duties transferred are transferred to the jurisdiction of the Department. This transfer of employees is not to be construed as altering any existing collective bargaining unit or the provisions of any existing collective bargaining agreement until the agreement has expired or

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until the bargaining unit has been modified by action of the personnel resources board as provided by law.

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: Housing and homelessness is a problem of biblical proportions. There is a war on our brothers and sisters. Commerce deserves an A for economic growth and an F for the ability to show leadership to address homeless/housing crisis. By putting these issues into its own agency, we can have a conversation about having affordable housing for all economic segments. The issue of housing literally effects every citizen in our state.

CON: The advantage of having housing within Commerce is the ability to work daily with community services and other teams that also help those in Washington. Commerce has a great relationship across divisions and they contract with similar contractors across the state. Commerce provides energy assistance and community jobs which helps people not be homeless. Having access to the Director, Executive Team and the Governor's office is readily available and allows Commerce to elevate the issue of homelessness.

OTHER: Under Commerce's current leadership investments in affordable housing have been handled exceptionally well. At the same time, we are facing an affordable housing and homeless crisis. Almost 200,000 households are paying more than half of their income for housing. Last week during the Point in Time homeless count, King County saw a 19 percent increase of those outside between the hours of 2 and 4am. It's time to elevate this issues and find solutions. Last year, more than 7000 were unsheltered.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Miloscia, Prime Sponsor.

CON: Diane Klontz, Department of Commerce-Assistant Director.

OTHER: Rachael Myers, WA Low Income Housing Alliance.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.