

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESHB 2010

As Amended by the Senate

Title: An act relating to the prevention of homelessness in wildfire areas.

Brief Description: Addressing homelessness in wildfire areas.

Sponsors: House Committee on Community Development, Housing & Tribal Affairs (originally sponsored by Representatives Maycumber, Dent, Blake, Kretz, Dye and Manweller).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Community Development, Housing & Tribal Affairs: 2/14/17, 2/16/17 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/6/17, 98-0.

Senate Amended.

Passed Senate: 4/7/17, 48-0.

Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill

- Requires the Department of Natural Resources, subject to appropriation, to provide funding to certain counties for equipment and services used for residential wildfire risk reduction activities to prevent homelessness.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, HOUSING & TRIBAL AFFAIRS

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Ryu, Chair; McCabe, Ranking Minority Member; Barkis, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Jenkin and Sawyer.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Reeves.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Macri, Vice Chair.

Staff: Kirsten Lee (786-7133).

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.

Background:

The State Homeless Housing Program.

The Homeless Housing and Assistance Act directs the Department of Commerce to develop a statewide homeless housing program. The Department of Commerce must implement the program through a 10-year strategic plan with the goal of reducing homelessness by 50 percent in the state, and within each county by 2015. Local governments must also develop their own 10-year homeless housing plans in coordination with the statewide plan.

State Fire Prevention and Response.

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is the lead state entity responsible for forest fire prevention and response on both state-owned and private forest land in Washington. The DNR's role is to assume direct charge of and supervision of all matters pertaining to forest fires. The DNR provides a number of wildfire prevention and preparedness resources to communities at risk for wildfires, including working with local fire districts, conservation districts, and counties through the Firewise Communities Program (Firewise) and connecting residents with the Ready, Set, Go Program (Ready, Set, Go).

Firewise is a public education program focused on wildfire preparedness. Firewise is a project of the National Fire Protection Association, cosponsored by the United States Forest Service, Department of the Interior, and National Association of State Foresters. Firewise emphasizes collaboration between individuals, neighborhoods, and local governments to reduce the risk of wildfire in areas susceptible to such disasters. Ready, Set, Go is administered by the International Associations of Fire Chiefs. Ready, Set, Go emphasizes preparedness and situational awareness before and during a wildfire, and is designed to help local fire departments teach individuals who live in high-risk wildfire areas how to best prepare for wildfire threats. The goals of Ready, Set, Go are to encourage communities, especially those located in or near a wildland-urban interface area, to plan ahead and take steps to reduce potential damage before and during a wildfire incident.

Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill:

Subject to appropriation, the DNR must provide funds to counties that are located east of the crest of the Cascade mountain range, share a common border with Canada, and have a population of 100,000 or less for radio communication equipment and their fire protection service providers to provide residential wildfire risk reduction activities. Funds received by these counties are intended to prevent homelessness by strengthening the capacity of local jurisdictions to control risk to life and property that may result from wildfires. The DNR must prioritize funding for qualifying counties serving a disproportionately higher percentage of low-income residents located in areas with high risk of wildfires, and whose fire protection service providers have a shortage of reliable fire service equipment and resources.

Wildfire risk reduction activities include education and outreach, technical assistance, fuel mitigation, and other residential risk reduction measures. Fire protection service providers include, fire departments, fire districts, emergency management services, and regional fire protection service authorities.

EFFECT OF SENATE AMENDMENT(S):

The Senate amendment:

- allows the Department of Natural Resources to transfer ownership of depreciated firefighting vehicles and related equipment to local fire districts in wildfire prone areas of the state;
- clarifies that specific provisions of the act are subject to the availability of appropriated funds; and
- adds an emergency clause.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) In some areas of the state, where there is a need to fund wildfire efforts, there are excess local homeless housing and assistance surcharge funds that could be used for this purpose. There is a need for counties to be able to access these existing funds for this added purpose.

(Opposed) There is a concern that expanding the use of local homeless housing and assistance surcharge funds will divert funding from current homeless programs. In the past, these funds have been used to provide aid to persons displaced from their homes because of wildfires, providing both temporary and long-term housing solutions. There is concern that this legislation will expand the use of these funds beyond homeless prevention and funds will be diverted to more fire specific activities, including fighting fires and clearing brush.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Maycumber, prime sponsor; and Wes McCart, Stevens County Commissioner.

(Opposed) Nick Federici, Washington Low-Income Housing Alliance.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.