

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 1485

As Passed House:
March 1, 2019

Title: An act relating to the appointment of religious coordinators.

Brief Description: Concerning the appointment of religious coordinators.

Sponsors: House Committee on State Government & Tribal Relations (originally sponsored by Representatives Lekanoff, Pettigrew, Shewmake, Gregerson, Entenman, Pellicciotti, Doglio, Appleton, Frame, Ormsby, Hudgins, Jinkins and Leavitt).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government & Tribal Relations: 2/6/19, 2/13/19 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/1/19, 70-24.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Changes the employee title "chaplain" to "religious coordinator" for institutions under the Department of Corrections, correctional institutions for juveniles under the Department of Children, Youth, and Families, and custodial and mental institutions under the control of the Department of Social and Health Services.
- Extends the housing allowance provided to chaplains to religious coordinators.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL RELATIONS

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Gregerson, Chair; Pellicciotti, Vice Chair; Walsh, Ranking Minority Member; Appleton, Dolan, Hudgins and Mosbrucker.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Goehner, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Smith.

Staff: Desiree Omlı (786-7105).

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 Department of Corrections (DOC) appoints as employees institutional chaplains for the correctional institutions under its jurisdiction to meet the religious needs of inmates. In addition, the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) is required to appoint chaplains for the correctional institutions for juveniles found delinquent by the juvenile courts. The Department of the Social and Health Services (DSHS) must appoint one or more chaplains for other custodial, correctional, and mental institutions, as applicable, under its control.

Chaplains serve as religious program coordinators for all faith groups. Every chaplain must have qualifications consistent with community standards of the faith group to which the chaplain belongs. The DOC may contract with chaplains as necessary to meet the religious needs of inmates whose religious denominations are not represented by institutional chaplains and where volunteer chaplains are not available.

A minister or other clergyperson employed as a chaplain in a state institution or agency may receive, in addition to his or her gross salary, a housing allowance as follows:

- the rental value of a home furnished to the person; or
- a housing allowance paid to the person as part of his or her compensation, in an amount equal to the rent or expense of the home, but not more than 40 percent of the person's gross salary.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The employee title "chaplain," as used by the DOC, DCYF, and DSHS is changed to "religious coordinator." The housing allowance available for chaplains is extended to religious coordinators.

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) This bill offers the opportunity to everyone who is healing to identify in the practice that best serves them. Inmates will be able to rehabilitate themselves through spirituality, which will reduce recidivism and will aid in successful reentry into society.

The term "chaplain" is associated with a particular religion, mainly Christianity. It is not associated with other faiths, such as tribal faiths, Muslim, Hindu, or the Jewish faith. Inmates who are not Christians would not be comfortable going to chaplains, and when they do, the chaplains do not always know what to do so they contact outside support. Using the term "religious coordinators" instead of "chaplains" will reflect the diversity of those in the state. In addition, the chaplain roles are predominantly filled by white males. Authorizing

the employment of religious coordinators will help to expand this role to women and people of color.

The bill would make the chaplain role less of a religious figure and more of a religious administrator to ensure that inmates are provided increased access to persons of different faith groups.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Lekanoff, prime sponsor; Gabe Galanda and Winona Stevens, Huy; Matthew Perry, Jewish Prisoners Services International; and Rabbi Seth Goldstein, Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.