

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5324

As Reported by House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to support for students experiencing homelessness.

Brief Description: Concerning support for students experiencing homelessness.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Frockt, Zeiger, Darneille, Walsh, Kuderer, Palumbo, Das, Hasegawa, Hunt, Wellman, Cleveland, Pedersen, Keiser, Nguyen, McCoy, Van De Wege, Dhingra and Saldaña).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 3/18/19, 3/26/19 [DPA].

**Brief Summary of Substitute Bill
(As Amended by Committee)**

- Modifies a competitive grant program of the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction that assists districts in identifying and supporting homeless students.
- Modifies a competitive grant program of the Department of Commerce, including changing who is eligible to receive funds, that links homeless students and their families with stable housing in the student's school district.
- Requires all kindergarten through grade 12 public schools to establish a building point of contact who is responsible for identifying homeless and unaccompanied homeless youth and connecting them with the school district's homeless student liaison.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 18 members: Representatives Santos, Chair; Dolan, Vice Chair; Paul, Vice Chair; Steele, Ranking Minority Member; McCaslin, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Volz, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Caldier, Callan, Corry, Kilduff, Kraft, Ortiz-Self, Rude, Stonier, Thai, Valdez and Ybarra.

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.

Staff: Ethan Moreno (786-7386).

Background:

Competitive Grants to Identify Homeless Students and Increase School District Supports.

Legislation enacted in 2016 (*i.e.*, Third Substitute House Bill 1682, enacted as Chapter 157, Laws of 2016) directed the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to create a competitive grant process to evaluate and award state-funded grants to school districts to increase identification of homeless students and the capacity of the districts to provide support.

As provided in the legislation, award criteria for the grants must be based on demonstrated need and may consider the number or overall percentage, or both, of homeless children and youths enrolled in preschool through grade 12 in the district, and the ability of the district to meet these needs. School districts may not use grant funds to supplant existing federal, state, or local resources for homeless student supports, but they may use grant funds for homeless education liaisons.

Districts receiving grants must measure during the academic year how often each student moves, what services families or unaccompanied youth could access, and whether a family or unaccompanied youth received stable housing by the end of the school year.

Homeless Students Housing Grant Program—Department of Commerce.

The 2016 legislation also established a grant program related to student homelessness in the Department of Commerce (Department). As prescribed in the legislation, the Department, subject to legislative funding and in consultation with the OSPI, must administer a competitive grant program that links homeless students, their families, and unaccompanied homeless students with stable housing located in the student's school district.

The legislatively established goal of the program is to provide educational stability for homeless students by promoting housing stability.

The grant awards, which are limited to \$100,000 per school, are for school districts partnered with eligible organizations, a term defined to include local governments, local housing authorities, federally recognized Indian tribes, and others. Total awards may not exceed \$500,000 per school district and grants are limited to a maximum of 15 school districts per school year. In determining which school districts receive grants, preference must be given to districts with a demonstrated commitment to partnership and history with the eligible organizations.

Applications for the grant program must include contractual agreements between the housing providers and the school districts defining the responsibilities and commitments of each party to identify, house, and support students. Eligible activities for assistance include, but are not limited to:

- rental assistance, including security deposits, utilities, and moving expenses;
- transportation assistance, including gasoline for vehicles and bus passes;
- emergency shelter; and
- housing stability case management.

Beneficiaries of funds from the grant program must be from very low-income households. "Very low-income" is defined as a family or unrelated persons living together whose adjusted income is less than 50 percent of the median family income, adjusted for household size, for the county where the grant recipient is located.

Grantee school districts must compile and report information to the Department. The Department must report to the Legislature the findings of the grantee, the housing stability of the homeless families, the academic performance of the grantee population, and any related policy recommendations.

To ensure that school districts are meeting the requirements of an approved program for homeless students the OSPI is required to monitor the programs at least once every two years. The program review and monitoring may be conducted concurrently with other program reviews and monitoring.

In its review, the OSPI must monitor program components that include the process used by the district to identify and reach out to homeless students, assessment data and other indicators to determine how well the district is meeting the academic needs of homeless students, district expenditures used to expand opportunities for these students, and the academic progress of students under the program.

Building Point of Contact for Unaccompanied Youth.

The 2016 legislation also required each school district that has identified more than 10 unaccompanied youth to establish a building point of contact in each middle school and high school. These building points of contact, which must be appointed by the principal of the designated school, are responsible for identifying homeless and unaccompanied youth and connecting them with the school district's homeless student liaison. The school district homeless student liaison is responsible for training the building points of contact.

Summary of Amended Bill:

Competitive Grants to Identify Students Experiencing Homelessness and Increase School District Supports.

Provisions governing the competitive grants awarded by the OSPI to assist districts in identifying and supporting students experiencing homelessness are modified in numerous ways, including:

- authorizing grant funds to be used in a manner that is complementary to federal funds provided for supporting students experiencing homelessness, and consistent with allowable uses as determined by the OSPI;
- specifying that the grants may be for two years;
- removing language specifically authorizing grant funds to be used for homeless education liaisons; and
- establishing that grantees must reflect geographic diversity across the state, and that greater weight must be given to districts that demonstrate a commitment to partnering with local housing and community-based organizations:

- with experience in serving the needs of students experiencing homelessness or students of color;
- serving the needs of unaccompanied youth; and
- implementing strategies, examples of which are included, to address the opportunity gap and other systemic inequities that negatively impact students experiencing homelessness and students of color.

Reporting requirements associated with the grants are also modified. Districts receiving grants are no longer required to provide the OSPI with annual information measuring the frequency of student moves during the academic year, what services families or unaccompanied youth could access, and whether a family or unaccompanied youth received stable housing by the end of the school year. Instead, districts are required to annually provide information to the OSPI on the academic outcomes, which are to be determined by the OSPI, for students served by the grants. Additionally, the OSPI must review the district reports and assist districts in using the data to identify gaps and needs, and to develop sustainable strategies to improve academic outcomes for students experiencing homelessness.

Students Experiencing Homelessness Housing Grant Program—Department of Commerce.

Numerous changes are made to provisions governing the competitive grant program of the Department that links students experiencing homelessness and their families with stable housing located in the student's school district. General summaries of principal changes, by category, are described below.

Program Administration/Goals. The Department is authorized to contract and consult with a nonprofit vendor in the state to provide technical assistance and program evaluation, and assist with making grant awards. If the Department contracts with a vendor, the vendor must be selected by the Director of the Department and must have a demonstrated record of working toward the housing and educational stability of students and families experiencing homelessness. The Department, alone or in partnership with its designee, must provide technical assistance and support to housing providers to better implement the program.

An additional goal of encouraging the development of collaborative strategies between housing and education partners is established.

Applications and Awards. The competitive process for awarding grants must be developed by either the Department or the designated vendor in consultation with the Department. Rather than awarding the grants to school districts partnered with eligible organizations, the grants are to be awarded to an eligible organization, a term that includes the eligible organizations described above, plus newly added behavioral health organizations. Provisions limiting the grant awards to \$100,000 per school and \$500,000 per district are removed, as is a provision limiting the grants to 15 or fewer districts per year.

In determining which eligible organizations will receive grants, the Department must ensure that selected grantees reflect geographic diversity across the state. Greater weight must be given to eligible organizations that demonstrate a commitment to:

- partnering with local schools or school districts; and
- developing and implementing strategies to address racial inequities, examples of which are included.

Applications for the grant program must include memoranda of understandings, rather than contractual agreements, between the housing providers and the school districts. The memoranda must include provisions specifying:

- how housing providers will partner with school districts to address gaps and needs, and develop sustainable strategies to help students experiencing homelessness; and
- how data on students experiencing homelessness and their families will be collected and shared in accordance with privacy protections under applicable federal and state laws.

Eligible Activities. The list of activities that are eligible for assistance under the grant program is expanded to include other collaborative housing strategies, including prevention and strength-based safety and housing approaches.

Beneficiaries. The eligible beneficiaries of funds from the grant program are no longer required to be unaccompanied youth or from very low-income households, but instead must be from households that include at least one student experiencing homelessness, as defined as a child or youth without a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence in accordance with the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

Reporting and Accountability. Grantee organizations must satisfy compilation and reporting duties, including tracking and reporting on the following measures:

- length of time enrolled in the grant program;
- housing destination at program exit;
- type of residence prior to enrollment in the grant program; and
- number of times homeless in the past three years.

Grantees are not required to provide information on the academic performance of the grantee population, but must include in their reports a narrative description discussing its partnership with school districts, and information about the kinds of supports grantees are providing students and families to support academic learning.

Program monitoring obligations of the OSPI are discontinued and transferred to the Department or the Department in partnership with its designee.

Building Point of Contact for Unaccompanied Youth.

Each kindergarten through grade 12 public school in the state, rather than each school district that has identified more than 10 unaccompanied youth, must establish a building point of contact in each elementary school, middle school, and high school. The OSPI must make available best practices for choosing and training the building points of contact to each school district.

Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill:

The amended bill makes the following changes to the original bill:

- modifies criteria governing how grants related to students experiencing homelessness may be awarded by the OSPI by specifying that greater weight must be given to districts that demonstrate a commitment to partnering with qualified organizations

- "with experience in serving the needs of students experiencing homelessness or students of color" and implementing "evidence-informed" strategies meeting specified requirements;
- modifies provisions delineating what specific strategies may include with respect to "inclusive programming;"
 - allows the OSPI grants to be for two years rather than making the two-year duration mandatory;
 - modifies criteria governing how grants related to students experiencing homelessness may be awarded by the Department by specifying that greater weight must be given to eligible organizations that demonstrate a commitment to developing and implementing "evidence-informed" strategies meeting specified requirements;
 - authorizes the Department to contract and consult with a qualifying nonprofit vendor in the state to provide technical assistance and program evaluation, and to assist with making grant awards; and
 - changes "homeless student" references to "students experiencing homelessness."
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Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: 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 is an update and refinement to the Homeless Students Stability Program (Program) adopted a few years ago. It includes new provisions to make the collected data more useful and timely, new housing stability grant provisions, including making the grants more helpful, and will create new building points of contact. This is Washington's version of the federal McKinney-Vento legislation.

Last year the Program received 43 grant applications for a total of \$2.74 million. School districts have expressed a clear need for funds through that program. The data elements of the bill help make data-driven decisions and improve outcomes for students experiencing homelessness.

The companion version of this legislation passed the House Education Committee unanimously. This bill passed the Senate Early Learning & K-12 Education Committee unanimously and was adopted by the Senate with a vote of 46 to 1. There is overwhelming bipartisan support for the Program, a program that is doing amazing work for school districts that receive funding from it.

Funds from the Program pay for support and outreach positions and efforts. The heart of outreach and support work is at the intersection of homeless student supports and education. More than 1,600 students in Tacoma schools are experiencing homelessness, with 244 being unaccompanied youth. The Program strengthens housing support programs and

partnerships with youth agencies. It has also brought to light students' experiences, the urgency of their needs to help them flourish academically, and the need for a racial equity lens to ensure that systems are meeting the needs of students of color.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Frockt, prime sponsor; Jess Lewis, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; Katara Jordan; Building Changes; and Sami Iverson, Tacoma Public Schools.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.