

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5441

As Reported by House Committee On:
Public Safety

Title: An act relating to rental vouchers to eligible offenders.

Brief Description: Extending rental vouchers for eligible offenders.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Nguyen, Wilson, C., Darneille, Cleveland, Salomon, Randall, Hasegawa and Kuderer).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Public Safety: 3/25/19, 4/1/19 [DP], 2/20/20, 2/25/20 [DP].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Extends the period in which the Department of Corrections may provide rental vouchers to an offender qualifying for earned early release and transferring to community custody from three to six months.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Goodman, Chair; Davis, Vice Chair; Klippert, Ranking Minority Member; Sutherland, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Graham, Lovick, Pellicciotti and Pettigrew.

Staff: Kelly Leonard (786-7147).

Background:

Offenders incarcerated in state correctional facilities may earn early release time for good behavior and good performance, with some exceptions and conditions. Certain offenders are also required to serve a term of community custody under the supervision of the Department of Corrections (DOC) following their release. Any offender who will serve a term of community custody must have an approved release plan in order to take advantage of earned early release time.

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.

An offender's release plan must include a specific residence and living arrangements. The DOC can deny an offender's release plan if the plan places the community or victims at risk, violates the terms of supervision, or places the offender at risk to reoffend or violate the conditions of supervision. The offender remains in the state correctional facility, up to his or her original release date, until he or she obtains an approved release plan.

The DOC may provide rental vouchers to an offender for up to three months if those vouchers will result in an approved release plan. Vouchers must be provided in conjunction with additional transition support services. These include, but are not limited to, substance use disorder treatment, mental health treatment, sex offender treatment, educational programming, or employment programming.

Summary of Bill:

Subject to a specific appropriation, the DOC may provide rental vouchers to an eligible offender for up to six months if those vouchers will result in an approved release plan.

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) Finding housing is extremely difficult for persons leaving correctional institutions. This is made worse by the current housing market. Many persons are released directly into homelessness or are otherwise housing insecure. Even inmates who have already secured employment still have fears and anxieties about housing. Lack of stable housing is the strongest barrier to successful reentry.

Current law allows for three months of rental vouchers for qualifying persons, but many people need more assistance. This bill would expand the discretion for the DOC to provide housing vouchers from three months to six months. The housing voucher program provides persons with a little time to accumulate sufficient funds for a deposit and other rental fees. The program should be expanded, both in terms of number of months and also in terms of the monetary amount of vouchers.

The Legislature is advancing multiple policy changes to advance successful reentry. This bill is foundational to all of these efforts. Persons need safe and secure housing first. This is the right program at the right time.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Nguyen, prime sponsor; Christopher Poulos, Statewide Reentry Council; Zachary Kinneman, What's Next Washington; and Paul Benz, Faith Action Network.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.