

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5324

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As of February 2, 2019

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

**Brief Description:** Concerning support for students experiencing homelessness.

**Sponsors:** 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:** Early Learning & K-12 Education: 1/28/19.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Requires each K-12 public school to establish a building point of contact to identify and support homeless and unaccompanied homeless youth.
- Makes changes to two grant programs supporting students experiencing homelessness.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

**Staff:** Ailey Kato (786-7434)

**Background:** McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act. This federal law provides grant funding to support school districts with serving students experiencing homelessness. It defines "homeless children" as individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. Under the Act, school districts are required to designate a liaison to ensure homeless children and youth are identified and served. According to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) website, Washington State receives approximately \$950,000 in federal funding each year.

The Office of Homeless Youth Prevention and Protection Programs within the Department of Commerce (Commerce) is responsible for coordinating a spectrum of ongoing and future funding, policy, and practice efforts related to homeless youth and improving the safety, health, and welfare of these youth.

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Building Point of Contact. Current state law requires each school district that has identified more than 10 unaccompanied youth to establish a building point of contact in middle and high schools. These points of contact are responsible for identifying homeless and unaccompanied youth and connecting them with the school district's liaison. State law defines "unaccompanied homeless student" as a student who is not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian, and is homeless.

Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction Grant Program. In 2016, OSPI created a competitive process to evaluate and award state-funded grants to school districts to identify and support students experiencing homelessness. Award criteria must be based on demonstrated need and may consider the number or overall percentage, or both, of homeless children and youth. School districts receiving grants must measure how often each student physically 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.

Department of Commerce Grant Program. In 2016, Commerce, in consultation with OSPI, administered a grant program that links homeless students and their families with stable housing located in the student's school district. Organizations eligible for these grants include any local government, local housing authority, regional support network, nonprofit community or neighborhood-based organization, federally recognized Indian tribe, or regional or statewide nonprofit housing assistance organization.

**Summary of Bill:** Building Point of Contact. Each K-12 public school in the state must establish a building point of contact regardless of the number of unaccompanied youth. This requirement applies to elementary, middle, and high schools. OSPI must make available best practices for choosing and training building points of contact.

Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction Grant Program. State funding provided through this grant program may be used in a manner complementary to federal McKinney-Vento funding and is consistent with allowable uses as determined by OSPI. Additional award criteria for this grant program specifies the grantees must reflect geographic diversity and greater weight be given to school districts demonstrating a commitment to:

- partnering with local housing and community-based organizations;
- serving the needs of unaccompanied youth; and
- implementing strategies to address the opportunity gap and other systemic inequities that negatively impact homeless students and students of color.

Examples of specific strategies are listed. These grants must be for two years.

The reporting requirements for school districts receiving grants are changed. School districts must monitor and report on the academic outcomes for students served by the grants. OSPI must review the reports and assist school districts in using the data to identify gaps and needs, and develop sustainable strategies to improve academic outcomes.

Department of Commerce Grant Program. An added goal of this grant program is to encourage the developing collaborative strategies between housing and education partners. To ensure these partnerships, Commerce may contract and consult with a designated vendor to provide technical assistance and program evaluation and assist making grant awards.

Behavioral health organizations are added as a type of organization eligible for this grant program. Applications for the grant program must include a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the housing providers and school districts. The MOU must include how they will address gaps and needs, develop sustainable strategies, and collect data.

Additional award criteria for this grant program specifies the grantees must reflect geographic diversity and greater weight be given to eligible organizations that demonstrate a commitment to:

- partnering with local schools or districts; and
- developing and implementing strategies to address racial inequities.

Examples of specific strategies are listed. All beneficiaries of the grant program must be from households that include at least one homeless student, which includes unaccompanied homeless youth.

Eligible organizations receiving grants must track and report the length of time beneficiaries are enrolled in the grant program; housing destination at program exit; type of residence prior to enrollment; number of times the beneficiary was homeless in the past three years; and a narrative description of the partnership with the school district.

**Appropriation:** The bill contains a section or sections to limit implementation to the availability of amounts appropriated for that specific purpose.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members:** No.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: Youth experiencing homelessness graduate at a much lower rate than their peers. A stable home environment is critical to allow a student to focus on school, graduate, and go to college. Many youth in our state do not have access to stable housing or resources and face many barriers. The grant programs included in this bill help students remain at the same school by bringing the school and housing systems together. It is important to connect these programs with behavioral health organizations. This bill complements federal McKinney-Vento funding. A building of contact makes sure that students know they have someone they can talk to. This work needs to be approached with a racial equity lens. The lengthy award criteria should be shortened and keep the emphasis on need.

**OTHER:** This bill would allow Commerce to better administer the grant program by providing flexibility with the contracts.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator David Frockt, Prime Sponsor; Keya Roy, Legislative Youth Advisory Council; Rhiannon Rasaretnam, Legislative Youth Advisory Council; Katara Jordan, Building Changes, Senior Manager, Policy & Advocacy; Leslie Van Leishout, North Thurston Public Schools, Director of Student Support; Samie Iverson, Tacoma Public

Schools, McKinney-Vento Liaison; Orion Olsen, Mockingbird Society; Melinda Dyer, OSPI; Austin Freeman, High School student, Legislative Youth Advisory Councilmember; Alfa Hordes-Johnson, citizen.

OTHER: Tedd Kelleher, Department of Commerce.

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