

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5376

As Reported by House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to promoting awareness of the governor's office of the education ombuds.

Brief Description: Promoting awareness of the governor's office of the education ombuds.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Early Learning & K-12 Education (originally sponsored by Senators Wilson, C., Wellman, Conway, Das, Hunt, Kuderer, Lias, Nobles and Saldaña).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 3/12/21, 3/23/21 [DPA].

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

- Requires public schools to take specified actions to notify students, families, and employees about the services available through the Office of the Education Ombuds.
- Directs the Office of the Education Ombuds to develop a template of the required notification information and to translate the template into Spanish and other languages as resources allow.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Santos, Chair; Dolan, Vice Chair; Ybarra, Ranking Minority Member; Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Berg, Bergquist, Callan, McCaslin, McEntire, Ortiz-Self, Rude, Steele and Stonier.

Staff: Megan Wargacki (786-7194).

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Background:

In 2006 the Office of the Education Ombuds (OEO) was created within the Office of the Governor to provide information to parents, students, and others regarding their rights and responsibilities with respect to the state's public elementary and secondary education system, and to advocate on behalf of elementary and secondary students. It is the lead agency for providing resources to families about public school antiharassment policies and strategies. All matters are treated as confidential by the OEO, except as necessary to perform the duties of the office.

The OEO describes its role as: listening to concerns and addressing questions about the public education system; using informal conflict resolution tools to support collaborative problem-solving and promote education justice; providing coaching, facilitation, training about family and community engagement, and systems advocacy; and collecting data and identifying trends to guide its education policy recommendations.

The OEO produces an annual report describing the work of the office and making recommendations to increase family and community involvement in public education and to improve educational opportunities for all students.

Summary of Amended Bill:

Beginning August 1, 2021, students and the parents or guardians of the students must be provided with information about the services available through the Office of the Education Ombuds (OEO) at the time of enrollment or admission in a public school, school district, or institutional education facility. "Institutional education facility" means residential habilitation and child study and treatment centers operated by the Department of Social and Health Services, state long-term juvenile institutions operated by the Department of Children, Youth, and Families, state-operated community facilities, county juvenile detention centers, and facilities of the Department of Corrections that incarcerate juveniles committed as adults.

Beginning August 1, 2021, each public school must perform either of the following actions:

1. include a link on its website to the OEO website with a description of the services provided by the OEO; or
2. provide a description of the services provided by the OEO and the contact information for the OEO in existing materials that are shared annually with families, students, and school employees, such as welcome packets, orientation guides, and newsletters.

Public schools are encouraged to perform both of these actions.

The OEO must annually develop and make available a template of the required notification

information. The OEO must also translate this template into Spanish and include other languages as resources allow.

Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill:

The amended bill requires information about the services available through the Office of the Education Ombuds be provided to students and their parents or guardians at the time of enrollment or admission in a public school, school district, or institutional education facility (a defined term). The amended bill also changes the implementation dates from September 1, 2021 to: (a) August 1, 2021, for the provision of information to students, families, and school employees; and (b) the effective date of the bill for the development of the template.

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) The Office of the Education Ombuds (OEO) was created in 2006. The OEO provides essential support and is a source of information for families and communities. Each year, the OEO helps over 1,000 students, families, and teachers resolve conflicts and navigate concerns. The OEO keeps issues out of costly legal systems by helping to resolve small issues before they become big issues.

The OEO provides collaborative, creative problem-solving services, when communication between parties has broken down. The kinds of issues that the OEO helps to address range from academic progress, bullying, discipline, attendance, inclusion, childcare, Internet connection, enrollment, and language access. The OEO works with families of students who are experiencing homelessness, who are in foster care, and who receive special education services. The OEO also brings student and family voice to public policy. A curriculum developed by the OEO can be used by educators and families working with students with disabilities to help them learn disability history and help students foster a strong sense of pride in themselves.

The work done by the OEO is very important to help students, families, and school staff navigate a complicated education system. The knowledge and expertise of staff in the OEO is needed now more than ever. Phone interpretation is available and materials to support families are available in a variety of languages.

Many people do not know about the OEO. Some districts prioritize sharing information

about the OEO, but some do not. It is critical that information about the OEO is shared with all families, students, and school staff each year. The bill will help students in every school district every day.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Wilson, prime sponsor; Carrie Basas, Governor's Office of the Education Ombuds; Jennifer Chong Cole, Washington Partnerships for Action, Voices for Empowerment; Sarah Butcher, Roots of Inclusion, SEL for Washington; and Trenise Rogers.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.