

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1004

As Passed House:

March 7, 2023

Title: An act relating to installing signs on or near bridges to provide information to deter jumping.

Brief Description: Installing signs on or near bridges to provide information to deter jumping.

Sponsors: Representatives Abbarno, Orcutt, Berry, Simmons, Graham, Schmidt, Christian, Lekanoff, Griffey, Dye, Klicker, Wylie, Cheney, Davis and Riccelli.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Transportation: 1/25/23, 2/2/23 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/7/23, 95-0.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission (Washington State Parks) to install a sign in memory of Zachary Lee Rager prior to January 1, 2024.
- Authorizes cities, towns, and counties to place informational signs near or attached to bridges providing location-specific information about the hazards of jumping.
- Requires the following entities to consider, before entering into a contract for the construction or replacement of a bridge, whether to require the installation of these informational signs as part of the contract: the Washington State Department of Transportation, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Washington State Department of Natural Resources, the Washington State Parks, port districts, and private railroad companies when a party to the construction contract is the state or a local jurisdiction with a relevant property

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interest.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 29 members: Representatives Fey, Chair; Donaghy, Vice Chair; Paul, Vice Chair; Timmons, Vice Chair; Barkis, Ranking Minority Member; Hutchins, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Low, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Robertson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Berry, Bronoske, Chapman, Cortes, Dent, Doglio, Duerr, Entenman, Goehner, Griffey, Hackney, Klicker, Mena, Orcutt, Ramel, Ramos, Schmidt, Taylor, Volz, Walsh and Wylie.

Staff: Jennifer Harris (786-7143).

Background:

No signs visible from the main traveled way of the interstate system, primary system, or scenic system may be erected or maintained unless they are directional or other official signs or notices required or authorized by law.

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) sets specifications for a uniform system of traffic control signals for use on public highways within the state. This uniform system is required to conform as much as possible to the system approved by the American Association of State Highway Officials and as set out in the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) for streets and highways, published by the United States Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration.

The WSDOT erects and maintains signs, signals, signboards, guideposts, and other traffic devices on state highways according to the adopted and designated state standard of design, erection, and location.

Local authorities place and maintain traffic devices on public highways under their jurisdiction as necessary to carry out the provisions of the law or local traffic ordinances or to regulate, warn, or guide traffic. Cities and towns with a population of over 15,000 are required to adequately equip streets that are designated as forming part of the route of a primary or secondary state highway and streets that constitute connecting roads and secondary state highways to these cities and towns with traffic devices under the direction of the WSDOT.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is tasked with preserving, protecting, perpetuating, and managing the wildlife and food fish, game fish, and shellfish in state and offshore waters. The Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) manages state trust land. The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission

(Washington State Parks) is tasked with the care, charge, control and supervision of all parks and parkways acquired or set aside by the state for park or parkway purposes.

Summary of Bill:

Signs on or near bridges that provide location-specific information on the hazards of jumping may be visible from the main traveled way of the interstate system, primary system, or scenic system, as long as they do not conflict with federal requirements.

A city's, town's, or county's executive officer or city, town, or county staff overseeing bridge operations and maintenance may authorize the erection of informational signs near or attached to bridges providing location-specific information about the hazards of jumping where people might otherwise assume a location is safe for swimming. Signs may include the statewide 988 suicide prevention hotline. Cities and towns responsible for the repair, replacement, and maintenance of bridges are encouraged to create a process for individuals to request the installation of such informational signs.

These signs are prohibited from conflicting with provisions of the MUTCD or existing state law related to the placement and design of signs placed along transportation corridors. If a sign is to be located along a state highway or the interstate system, the WSDOT must be notified of the location, but no permit is required from the WSDOT.

Cities, towns, and counties may accept gifts and donations to pay for the creation, installation, or maintenance of these informational signs.

Before entering into a contract for the construction or replacement of a bridge, the WSDOT, the WDFW, the DNR, the Washington State Parks, and port districts must consider whether to require the installation of these informational signs as part of the contract. This requirement does not apply to replacements of culverts that are barriers to fish passage by the WSDOT. Before entering into a contract for the construction or replacement of a bridge when a party to the construction contract is the state or a local jurisdiction with a relevant property interest, private railroad companies must also consider whether to require the installation of these informational signs as part of the contract.

The WSDOT must grant approval of a sign to be located along a state highway or the interstate system. Signs posted within the right-of-way of the state highway system are prohibited from conflicting with provisions of the MUTCD or state law related to the placement and design of signs placed along transportation corridors. Signs erected on state highways must conform to any state standards established by the WSDOT for the signs' manufacture, display, placement, and location.

These provisions do not create a private right of action by, or a legal duty to, any party, and may not be used to impose liability if a sign has or has not been erected. The State of Washington, including all of its agencies, subdivisions, employees, and agents, are not

liable in tort for any violation of these provisions.

By January 1, 2024, the Washington State Parks is required to install a sign in memory of Zachary Lee Rager on or near the bridge where he lost his life as a result of cold-water shock.

The stated legislative intent is to create a pathway for governments to work with individuals and communities to place more signs with location-appropriate information to prevent future deaths from cold-water shock drowning.

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) Zachary Rager was a Centralia High School student who was a very fit, strong swimmer who jumped from a bridge into the river on a warm, sunny day. He had jumped from it many times before, but on March 23, 2021, he hit the water where there was a lot of snow melt and it was bitter cold. He drowned, succumbing to cold water shock.

Zachary Rager was the eighteenth person to die from jumping from that bridge. This bill focuses on the placement of signs where there is a potential for cold water shock drownings. Cold water shock is very prevalent in Washington. Sudden immersion in water up to 60 degrees can cause cold water shock, which can cause cardiac arrest, fatigue, and vertigo. It is a hidden danger that not a lot of people understand. People need to be educated about this danger to save lives.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) Signs that say no trespassing are often ignored. Language on signs located at trestles for train tracks could also be enhanced to explain that an unexpected train could force people to have to jump from a bridge. Incidents like this are traumatic for families and for crew members on trains. This is a significant issue around the Columbia River. Uniform language for railroad bridges should also be considered.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Peter Abbarno, prime sponsor; Kimberly and Lee Hines; and Bonnie Smilonich.

(Other) Herb Krohn, Sheet Metal Air Rail and Transportation Division and United Transportation Union.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.