

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6273

As of January 25, 2024

Title: An act relating to conducting an audit of the juvenile rehabilitation system.

Brief Description: Conducting an audit of the juvenile rehabilitation system.

Sponsors: Senators Boehnke, Dozier, Gildon and Wilson, C..

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services: 1/25/24.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee to conduct an audit of the juvenile rehabilitation system.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Staff: Kelsey-anne Fung (786-7479)

Background: Juvenile Rehabilitation Institutions. On July 1, 2019, the Juvenile Rehabilitation division (JR) transferred from the Department of Social and Health Services to the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF). JR operates two secure residential facilities for juveniles who are convicted of crimes and serving more than 30 days of confinement. The Echo Glen Children's Center in Snoqualmie serves younger males and female juveniles. The Green Hill School in Chehalis serves older male juveniles.

JR also operates eight community residential facilities which allow youth to begin transitioning back to the community. These facilities provide treatment, education, and vocational services. To be eligible for placement at a community residential facility a youth must be placed on minimum security status.

Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee. The Joint Legislative Audit and Review

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.

Committee (JLARC) is a statutorily created body consisting of eight members from the Senate and eight members from the House of Representatives, with not more than four members from each house from the same political party. The nonpartisan staff of JLARC conduct performance audits, program evaluations, tax performance reviews, sunset reviews, and other analyses assigned by the Legislature and JLARC itself.

Summary of Bill: JLARC must review:

- JR's existing processes and staffing methods for determining adequate staffing ratios to meet the confinement and rehabilitative needs of the juveniles and ensure public safety;
- existing security and safety measures and their effectiveness in meeting the unique needs of the juvenile population in the custody of DCYF;
- best practices from other states regarding security measures and staffing ratios, and identify options that may be feasible to adopt in Washington State to increase the security of DCYF's institutions and facilities and public safety; and
- review existing processes for responding to critical incidents, including communication and cooperation with local law enforcement, and identify areas for improvement.

JLARC must report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature by June 30, 2026.

The bill expires December 31, 2026.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 22, 2024.

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: This would allow a holistic review of the agency to address any issues in a holistic fashion. This will improve the safety and security of individuals that work at the facilities and the juvenile residents in the facilities. This review will also make sure the state is in compliance with state and federal laws that have evolved over time, including upgrading building codes, technology, and innovation. There has been a lot of critical incidents in the news recently that are concerning and children in the facilities and the facilities need to be protected.

OTHER: The review should be comprehensive and also focus on the rehabilitative qualities of JR facilities like lack of meaningful treatment for substance use, disciplinary and infraction procedures, use of solitary confinement, and how staff are recruited and trained to have a rehabilitative focus. The review should look at programming and access to education

and housing vouchers upon release as part of reentry as well as security and technology needs. There are many challenges with providing and developing developmentally appropriate opportunities especially as the population gets older and comes with different needs. The review should have a wider lens and give real thought to what JR stands for as focus on rehabilitation and therapeutic support is disappearing.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Matt Boehnke, Prime Sponsor; Kateta Demmings, Kids Are Kids.

OTHER: Karen Pillar, TeamChild; Allison Krutsinger, Dept of Children, Youth, and Families.

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