

Health Care Committee

ESSB 5522

Brief Description: *Creating an office of mental health ombudsman.*

Sponsors: *By Senate Committee on Human Services & Corrections (originally sponsored by Senators Kastama, Hargrove, Thibaudeau, Winsley, Kohl-Welles, Long, Costa, Snyder, Deccio, Fraser and Rasmussen).*

Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill

- *Creates a Mental Health Ombudsman in the Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development.*

Hearing Date: *3/22/01*

Staff: *Dave Knutson (786-7146).*

Background:

The current Mental Health Ombudsman Program is run from within the Regional Support Networks (RSNs) and state psychiatric hospitals. There is also a quality review team process overseen by the Mental Health Division of the Department of Social and Health Services. Ombudsmen are required to be "functionally independent," but are employed by and often located within the RSNs. Some people have expressed concerns that ombudsmen are not free to act in an independent manner and may not have the authority that other state ombudsman programs have.

Summary of Bill:

A Mental Health Ombudsman (MHO) is created. Services are provided by a nonprofit organization contracting with the Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development (CTED). The CTED chooses the contractor through a competitive process, and provides some administrative support.

The Mental Health Ombudsman must investigate and resolve complaints at the lowest level

appropriate, and to ensure that quality review teams are established. The MHO must establish a statewide reporting system, engage in outreach activities, establish a toll-free number, and report to the Legislature annually.

The Mental Health Ombudsman must develop and implement a working agreement with the long-term care ombudsman, the children and family services ombudsman, and the Washington Protection and Advocacy System to coordinate services. The MHO also must establish working agreements with each RSN, the state psychiatric hospitals, and the Mental Health Division. The RSNs and state hospitals must cooperate with the MHO and respond in writing to all recommendations, identifying the actions taken to address them.

The Legislature intends that CTED's state Mental Health Ombudsman Program expend no more than the amount currently expended on RSN and state hospital ombudsman services and quality review teams, and the amount spent by the Mental Health Division on staff support and training for the quality review teams and ombudsman services.

Appropriation: *None.*

Fiscal Note: *Not Requested.*

Effective Date: *The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect on July 1, 2002.*