

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6363

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Health & Long-Term Care, January 30, 2006

Title: An act relating to developing worksite health promotion programs.

Brief Description: Developing worksite health promotion programs.

Sponsors: Senators Keiser, Benson, Franklin, Poulsen, Thibaudeau, Kline and Parlette.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Health & Long-Term Care: 1/25/06, 1/30/06 [DPS-WM, w/oRec].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6363 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Keiser, Chair; Thibaudeau, Vice Chair; Deccio, Ranking Minority Member; Benson, Franklin, Johnson, Kastama, Kline, Parlette and Poulsen.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senator Brandland.

Staff: Jonathan Seib (786-7427)

Background: Both public and private employers in Washington continue to be frustrated by the rising cost of medical treatment, and the corresponding increase in their health insurance expenditures. One strategy suggested to help mitigate these expenditures is the implementation of worksite health promotion programs intended to reduce the need and demand for expensive medical care. These programs may include things such as smoking cessation plans, the promotion of physical activity and good nutrition, and at-work wellness lectures. Employers who have adopted such programs report a reduction in health care expenditures, a reduction in other health-related business costs such as absenteeism, and increased productivity.

Department of Health (DOH) data suggests that as a group, workers in Washington are not engaged in health-related activities that could prevent or delay illness. Forty-four percent, for example, do not get sufficient physical activity, and seventy-eight percent do not eat according to recommended guidelines. Even those who are insured underutilize recommended preventive services.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The Legislature finds that worksite health promotion programs have both health and financial benefits, and states its intent to encourage their development.

The Health Care Authority must develop a voluntary, confidential on-line health assessment tool for state employees and private sector employers which allows a participant to compare his or her personal health information with local and national data, and generates

recommendations about activities most likely to improve individual health. Private sector employers may be charged an administrative fee to participate.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The substitute bill adds language stating the intent of the Legislature to encourage the development of worksite health promotion programs. It also removes a section from the original requiring the Public Employee Benefits Board to develop a financial incentives program to encourage state employee participation in health promotion activities, and a section requiring the Department of Health to develop a healthy worksite grant program.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Testimony For: We know that worksite health promotion programs are effective at improving employee health and reducing costs. Using strategies addressed in the bill, companies have already seen significant reductions in health insurance costs. This bill would help people in the workplace. This bill is an effort to take action to address problems such as obesity and its related health effects, and could be a model for the rest of the country. There are few who are not helped by exercise and improved nutrition, and we need to do more to promote them. The bill would also make for more productive workplaces. When employers encourage healthy choices through workplace wellness or health promotion programs, both the employees and the bottom line reap the benefits.

Testimony Against: None.

Testimony Other: This is an area of interest for the Governor, and she does address this in her budget. One of the difficulties with these programs is that there is a cost investment that needs to be made before you see any savings. We should make sure that the questions in any health assessment are in fact related to employee health.

Who Testified: PRO: Amy Johnson, Inland Northwest Business Coalition on Health, Spokane Regional Chamber; Diane Lenier, Inland Northwest Health Services; Dr. Steve Tarnoff, Karen Merrikin, Group Health Cooperative; Marianne Jackson, Fitness to Go Personal Training; Greg Vigdor, Washington Health Foundation; Tom Bristow, Public Health Seattle and King County.

OTHER: Dennis Martin, Health Care Authority; Senator Mike Carrell.