

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 2368

As Passed Legislature

Title: An act relating to assisting refugees and immigrants by describing the role of the office of refugee and immigrant assistance within the department of social and health services in administering federal funding regarding refugee support services and authorizing the office of refugee and immigrant assistance within the department of social and health services to administer services to immigrants.

Brief Description: Assisting refugees and immigrants.

Sponsors: House Committee on Human Services, Youth, & Early Learning (originally sponsored by Representatives Gregerson, Eslick, Thai, Low, Senn, Leavitt, Davis, Farivar, Nance, Reed, Doglio, Ramel, Simmons, Ormsby, Street, Goodman, Timmons, Pollet and Santos).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Human Services, Youth, & Early Learning: 1/24/24, 1/31/24 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/13/24, 61-35.

Passed Senate: 2/28/24, 29-20.

Passed Legislature.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to coordinate statewide efforts to support the economic and social integration and basic needs of immigrants and refugees arriving and resettling in Washington.
- Authorizes the DSHS to administer services to immigrants who are ineligible for federally funded services.

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.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES, YOUTH, & EARLY LEARNING

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Senn, Chair; Cortes, Vice Chair; Rule, Vice Chair; Eslick, Ranking Minority Member; Callan, Dent, Goodman, Ortiz-Self and Taylor.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Couture, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Walsh.

Staff: Luke Wickham (786-7146).

Background:

Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance.

The Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance (ORIA) within the Department of Social and Health Services administers federally funded programs that provide support to eligible individuals including employment preparation and training, health and wellness supports (including Refugee Medical Assistance and the Refugee Health Promotion Program), immigration assistance and naturalization services, whole family services, job placement, English language training, and Refugee Cash Assistance.

The three largest programs administered by the ORIA include:

- the Limited English Proficiency Pathway Employment and English Language Training Program;
- naturalization services; and
- the Promoting Refugee Integration, Mobility and Empowerment Program (which provides case management, education, and immigration-related legal services).

Immigrants who entered the United States with one of the following statuses or were granted one them after entry may receive refugee resettlement services:

- refugees;
- asylees;
- certain Amerasians;
- Cuban-Haitian entrants;
- certified victims of trafficking and their eligible family members; and
- Special Immigrant Visa holders from Iraq or Afghanistan and their eligible family members.

For purposes of programs administered by the ORIA, a refugee is an individual granted refugee status overseas by the United States Department of Homeland Security because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion and unable or unwilling to return to their home country.

Some refugees are eligible to apply for general federal assistance programs, such as cash assistance through Supplemental Security Income or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, health insurance through Medicaid, and food assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) is required to coordinate statewide efforts to support the economic and social integration and basic needs of immigrants and refugees arriving and resettling in Washington.

The DSHS is designated as the lead state agency responsible for the development, review, and administration of the Washington State Plan for Refugee Resettlement (State Plan). The DSHS must submit the State Plan to, and seek approval from, the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement within the federal Department of Health and Human Services. The DSHS must also coordinate with local, state, and federal government agencies and other stakeholders.

The DSHS must provide refugee cash assistance, refugee medical assistance, and refugee support services according to the State Plan. These services may include:

- employment services;
- English language instruction;
- case management; and
- other services or assistance consistent with federal law.

The DSHS is authorized to administer services to immigrants who are ineligible for federally funded services. The DSHS may contract with external entities, including community-based organizations, to provide services to immigrants who are ineligible for federally funded services. The DSHS must engage communities impacted to determine an equitable funding distribution and contracting process when the DSHS contracts with community-based organizations to administer services to immigrants who are ineligible for federal services.

An "immigrant" is defined as a person who has arrived in the United States and the state of Washington from another country seeking residence who is not a naturalized citizen.

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) This is a good government bill to align some of the things that the state is already doing.

King County is working with partners to help address the needs of people seeking asylum and living in shelters at the Riverton Park United Methodist Church in Tukwila.

Hundreds of families and individuals are arriving in our region seeking asylum.

King County has temporarily sheltered over 300 people in a hotel and has provided health care services to those people, but a long-term solution is needed.

There is an encampment in Tukwila that needs support. Adequate resources, particularly housing supports, are not available to support newly arriving migrants. A long-term sustainable solution is needed. The City of Tukwila and King County do not have enough resources to effectively support this population.

This bill will provide the needed support for newly arriving migrants. Housing is not specifically designated as a service that will be provided in the bill and should be included.

Since the spring of last year, a small church in the city of Tukwila, the Riverton Park United Methodist Church, has been the epicenter of asylum seekers coming to Western Washington. In the fall of 2023 the city of Tukwila declared a state of emergency to respond to the situation. There have been individuals with children sleeping there in outdoor tents. The City of Tukwila is trying to manage this situation, but does not have enough resources. It should not fall on one city to address this regional humanitarian crisis.

This bill will clearly define the Department of Social and Health Service as coordinating the state response.

State leadership and a statewide plan are needed to address this crisis.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) For more than 40 years, the Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance (ORIA) has been coordinating and administering services to welcome refugees and humanitarian immigrants.

This bill codifies the existing programs supported by ORIA and expands some of that office's authority.

The ORIA is mandated to submit a Washington State Plan for Refugee Resettlement (State Plan) for refugee resettlement services every year to the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) and the ORIA receives funding from the ORR to provide services and supports that refugees need to build their lives and achieve economic stability in

Washington. The ORIA is required to submit a State Plan and receives funding from the ORR.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Mia Gregerson, prime sponsor; Sandra Rodarte, Latino Civic Alliance; Michael Padilla Ocampo, King County; Thomas McLeod, City of Tukwila; and Alex Hur, OneAmerica.

(Other) Babs Roberts, Economic Services Administration, Department of Social and Health Services; and Sarah Peterson, Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance, Department of Social and Health Services.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.