
HOUSE BILL 1718

State of Washington

68th Legislature

2023 Regular Session

By Representatives Rule, Mena, Leavitt, Paul, Bronoske, and Lekanoff

1 AN ACT Relating to creating the "parks Rx" health and wellness
2 pilot programs; creating new sections; and providing an expiration
3 date.

4 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** (1) The legislature finds that one of the
6 best and most cost-effective ways for the residents of Washington
7 state to achieve physical and mental health, and to prevent costly
8 diseases and conditions such as diabetes, obesity, heart disease, and
9 other coronary conditions, is to get regular exercise and physical
10 activity. In fact, as part of a study done for the recreation and
11 conservation office on the benefits of trail-based activities, the
12 University of Washington conducted a literature review of over 100
13 studies that identified evidence of a close linkage between health
14 benefits and being outdoors. The literature review further found that
15 the health benefits of nature "may be particularly impactful for the
16 12.2 percent who have incomes below the poverty level."

17 (2) The legislature further finds that for all residents, public
18 parks and trails, recreation programs, and open spaces offer
19 equitable, no-cost, or low-cost options for all people to be active
20 and healthy, with these spaces receiving record levels of use during
21 the COVID-19 pandemic.

1 (3) The legislature finds that it can harness the equitable, low-
2 cost, or no-cost opportunities provided by parks and recreation
3 spaces, and build upon successful programs established in areas such
4 as the East Bay of California and Pittsburgh, and the states of
5 Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Utah, by establishing a program in
6 Washington state through which parks and recreation officials, health
7 care providers, as well as public and community health advocates can
8 work collaboratively to design a program that will incentivize
9 residents, particularly those from communities experiencing
10 inequities or without ready access to physical fitness facilities, to
11 regularly use public parks and recreation sites, facilities and
12 programs to enable better physical and mental health outcomes, and
13 decrease visits to hospitals and clinics.

14 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** (1) The department of health shall create
15 an advisory committee for the "parks Rx" health and wellness pilot
16 programs and the membership of the committee shall include
17 communities that have been historically marginalized in access to
18 parks.

19 (2) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this
20 specific purpose, the secretary of health, in collaboration with the
21 advisory committee for the "parks Rx" health and wellness pilot
22 programs, shall:

23 (a) Establish a minimum of three pilot programs using the
24 recommendations from the 2022 department of health task force report
25 to create an operational program structure and hire staff personnel.
26 The two-year pilot programs must be located in each of the following
27 regions of Washington state: Puget Sound, eastern Washington, and
28 southwest Washington regions;

29 (b) Develop a competitive request for proposal process to select
30 the pilot programs and begin the process by or before February 1,
31 2024;

32 (c) Review the pilot program applications and select the pilot
33 programs by August 1, 2024;

34 (d) Create an evaluation criteria for the request for proposal
35 process that strongly focuses on:

36 (i) Identifying populations experiencing the greatest health care
37 disparities;

38 (ii) Forming partnerships with health and wellness providers;

1 (iii) Working with leaders of disadvantaged communities to bring
2 lived experience perspectives;

3 (iv) Conducting outreach to local governments and organizations
4 that can provide fitness spaces, trails, community centers, and other
5 similar facilities for usage; and

6 (v) Developing a data-gathering and measuring system to evaluate
7 the program's effectiveness and impact on the health and well-being
8 of individuals and communities;

9 (e) Submit a report to the governor and relevant committees of
10 the legislature in compliance with RCW 43.01.036 by July 1, 2027. The
11 report shall contain at a minimum, the following:

12 (i) An assessment of the performance for each pilot program
13 during the two-year period noting the successes, challenges, and
14 current gaps within the pilot programs that include measuring
15 community engagement and identifying current community and
16 organization partnerships and potential areas of improvement;

17 (ii) An impact assessment of the three-region pilot programs on
18 community and individual health and well-being, taking into
19 consideration a review of the different ways individuals may
20 experience health impacts of being outdoors depending on history,
21 culture, and other social determinants of health;

22 (iii) An analysis of the pilot program that identifies the
23 resources and tools needed to ensure the long-term sustainability of
24 the program including estimates for the appropriate level of
25 staffing, capital, and operational and maintenance efforts needed for
26 the program to continue operating; and

27 (iv) Recommendations on potential funding and resource options
28 that, at minimum, include federal funding opportunities, grants and
29 loans, corporate and civic donations, as well as state funding, if
30 necessary.

31 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** This act expires August 1, 2027.

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