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HOUSE BILL 2136

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State of Washington

67th Legislature

2022 Regular Session

By Representatives Shewmake and Paul

Read first time 03/04/22. Referred to Committee on State Government & Tribal Relations.

1 AN ACT Relating to establishing the Washington state rural  
2 commission; adding a new chapter to Title 43 RCW; and creating a new  
3 section.

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

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature declares that the public  
6 policy of this state is to ensure vital, thriving communities for all  
7 Washingtonians. The legislature believes that no person's health or  
8 economic outcomes should be determined by their zip code, and it  
9 recognizes that the state is responsible for improving its engagement  
10 with people who live in rural areas. In order to improve the lives  
11 and livelihoods of people in rural areas, the legislature seeks to  
12 implement effective policies that recognize their unique needs and to  
13 include rural experiences and expertise in all aspects of  
14 policymaking and state government. Therefore, the legislature deems  
15 it necessary to create a commission to carry out the purposes of this  
16 chapter.

17 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** The definitions in this section apply  
18 throughout this chapter unless the context clearly requires  
19 otherwise.

20 (1) "Commission" means the Washington state rural commission.

1 (2) "Rural" means areas within the state:

2 (a) In which open space, the natural landscape, and vegetation  
3 predominate over the built environment;

4 (b) That foster traditional rural lifestyles, rural-based  
5 economies, and opportunities to both live and work in rural areas;

6 (c) That have not been subjected to an extensive conversion of  
7 land into sprawling, low-density development; and

8 (d) That generally utilize rural governmental services and do not  
9 require the extension of urban governmental services, as defined in  
10 RCW 36.70A.030.

11 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** Subject to the availability of amounts  
12 appropriated for this specific purpose, the Washington state rural  
13 commission is established in the office of the governor. The  
14 commission shall be administered by an executive director, who shall  
15 be appointed by, and serve at the pleasure of, the governor. The  
16 governor shall set the salary of the executive director. The  
17 executive director shall employ the staff of the commission. The  
18 executive director and any staff may work remotely to facilitate  
19 their engagement with rural communities.

20 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** (1) The commission consists of 13 members  
21 appointed by the governor.

22 (2) The governor shall consider nominations for membership based  
23 upon maintaining a balanced and diverse distribution of racial and  
24 ethnic identity, geography, gender identity, sexual orientation, age,  
25 socioeconomic status, and occupational representation, whenever  
26 practicable.

27 (3) The governor's appointees shall include:

28 (a) Ten members of the public, with one person who is employed in  
29 each of the following 10 fields: Health care, agriculture, natural  
30 resources, small business, manufacturing, construction,  
31 prekindergarten-12 education, child care, community advocacy, and  
32 local government;

33 (b) One person who is a member of a tribal government; and

34 (c) Two representatives of the state's public higher education  
35 system: One of whom is an employee of the Washington State University  
36 cooperative extension, and one of whom represents the state's  
37 community college system.

1 (4) All commission members serve at the pleasure of the governor,  
2 but in no case may any member serve more than three years without  
3 formal reappointment by the governor. Of the persons initially  
4 appointed by the governor to the commission, five must be appointed  
5 to serve one year, four to serve two years, and four to serve three  
6 years. Upon the expiration of those terms, all subsequent  
7 appointments are for three years. Any vacancies occurring in the  
8 membership of the commission must be filled for the remainder of the  
9 unexpired term in the same manner as the original appointments.

10 (5) The commission shall have four advisory members: Two members  
11 of the senate, one from each of the two major political parties,  
12 appointed by the president of the senate; and two members of the  
13 house of representatives, one from each of the two major political  
14 parties, appointed by the speaker of the house of representatives.  
15 All advisory members must support the legislative intent of the  
16 commission. The legislative advisory members are nonvoting members.  
17 All legislative advisory members shall serve for a two-year term and  
18 the position of any legislative advisory member shall be deemed  
19 vacated whenever such member ceases to be a member of the house from  
20 which the member was appointed.

21 (6)(a) Nonlegislative members must be reimbursed for expenses  
22 incurred in the performance of their duties in accordance with RCW  
23 43.03.050 and 43.03.060.

24 (b) Legislative members shall be reimbursed for expenses incurred  
25 in the performance of their duties in accordance with RCW 44.04.120.

26 (7) A simple majority of the commission's membership constitutes  
27 a quorum for the purpose of conducting business. Legislative advisory  
28 members are not included in determining a quorum.

29 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 5.** The executive director of the commission  
30 shall:

31 (1) Monitor state legislation affecting people who live in rural  
32 areas;

33 (2) Work with state agencies to assess programs and policies that  
34 affect people who live in rural areas;

35 (3) Coordinate with other commissions to address issues of mutual  
36 concern; and

37 (4) Work as a liaison between the public and private sector to  
38 eliminate barriers to economic and health equity for people in rural  
39 areas.

1        NEW SECTION.        **Sec. 6.**        (1) The commission shall have the  
2 following duties:

3        (a) Actively recruit and maintain a list of names of qualified  
4 people who live in rural areas to fill vacancies on various boards  
5 and commissions;

6        (b) Provide a clearinghouse for information regarding both state  
7 and federal legislation as it relates to the purposes of this  
8 chapter;

9        (c) Promote equal treatment of and effective delivery to rural  
10 areas by government agencies and the private sector;

11        (d) Identify and define specific needs of people of color in  
12 rural areas and provide recommendations for addressing those needs;

13        (e) Review and make recommendations to the legislature on  
14 strategies to increase the number of rural communities able to  
15 attract, access, and utilize private, state, and federal funding;

16        (f) Consult with state agencies regarding the effect of agency  
17 policies, procedures, practices, laws, and administrative rules on  
18 the unique problems and needs of people in rural areas. The  
19 commission shall also provide any data, input, and recommendations to  
20 state agencies on proposed agency rules and the development and  
21 implementation of comprehensive and coordinated policies, plans, and  
22 programs focusing on those problems and needs;

23        (g) Provide resource and referral information to agencies and the  
24 public. The commission may gather data and disseminate information to  
25 the public in order to implement the purposes of this chapter;

26        (h) Consult with relevant community development financial  
27 institutions, philanthropic organizations, and other nonprofit  
28 organizations;

29        (i) Hold public hearings to gather input on issues related to the  
30 unique problems and needs of people who live in rural areas;

31        (j) Advocate for removal of legal, economic, and social barriers  
32 for rural residents; and

33        (k) Review best practices and success stories in rural  
34 communities and provide recommendations to state agencies and other  
35 stakeholders to adopt policy measures that improve the lives and  
36 livelihoods of people in rural areas.

37        (2) The commission must submit a report to the appropriate  
38 committees of the legislature and the governor every two years  
39 detailing the commission's activities. The report submitted must be

1 in electronic format pursuant to RCW 43.01.036, and include, at  
2 minimum:

3 (a) Recommendations for addressing the needs identified under  
4 subsection (1) of this section;

5 (b) Input received during public hearings and recommendations for  
6 addressing the problems and needs discussed at the public hearings;  
7 and

8 (c) Recommendations regarding recognizing the contributions of  
9 rural communities and the diversity of rural residents to the overall  
10 economic vitality of Washington state.

11 (3) State agencies must provide appropriate and reasonable  
12 assistance to the commission as needed, including providing notice of  
13 agency proposed rule making and gathering data and information,  
14 including but not limited to voluntary demographics, economic  
15 disparity studies, and other collectible data by state agencies, in  
16 order for the commission to carry out the purposes of this chapter.

17 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 7.** (1) The commission has the power to  
18 receive gifts, grants, and endowments from public or private sources  
19 that are made for the use or benefit of the commission and to expend  
20 the same or any income therefrom according to their terms and the  
21 purposes of this chapter. The commission's executive director shall  
22 make a report of such funds received from private sources to the  
23 office of financial management on a regular basis. Such funds  
24 received from private sources must not be applied to reduce or  
25 substitute for the commission's budget as appropriated by the  
26 legislature, but must be applied and expended toward projects and  
27 functions authorized by this chapter that were not funded by the  
28 legislature.

29 (2) In carrying out its duties, the commission may establish such  
30 relationships with public and private institutions, local  
31 governments, private industry, community organizations, and other  
32 segments of the general public as may be needed to promote equal  
33 opportunity for people in rural areas in government, education,  
34 economic security, employment, and services.

35 (3) The commission may adopt rules and regulations pursuant to  
36 chapter 34.05 RCW as are necessary to implement the purposes of this  
37 chapter.

1        NEW SECTION.        **Sec. 8.**        Sections 2 through 7 of this act  
2        constitute a new chapter in Title 43 RCW.

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