

HB 3168: Cooperating on criteria for background checks

I've heard from local organizations, and from employees, and human service providers, and educators -- about having to get a separate background checks -- for the same person. Just to provide home care for a senior living in a home a few blocks away from where they're providing home care for another senior. Or to volunteer at their child's school after having cleared a background check for their job working with children. And more examples. In the professional jargon, their licenses are not "portable" from one place to another.

This bill is one of a package of four bills that comes out of the work group set up by the 2012 legislative assembly to straighten out the tangle of separate processes and uncoordinated approaches of about 50 separate agencies and boards. The work group looked for -- and found - opportunities for a streamlined process.

This bill puts us on the road toward some portability, where possible, to save money and time and not compromise public safety. The bill directs the state Department of Administrative Services to bring the agencies together to work out as much as they can. The bill establishes categories or clusters of occupations: individuals working with children, with the elderly, with the disabled (including mental health), and with the general public, such as nurses and tax accountants. The work group will look at the variation in rules for the different occupations that fall under the umbrella of each cluster¹. And they'll develop a simplified approach for examining a person's suitability to work in that area. That's what the report calls "fitness determination." As the report explains, the objective is to align and normalize the criteria.

[In the words of one of my local non-profit organization directors: "All human services organizations are frustrated by the cumbersome, often confusing and sometimes costly steps needed to secure Criminal Records Checks for staff and volunteers." ... She goes on to say "we welcome a more streamlined, centralized system that functions better not only for the employee, but also the organization and ultimately the vulnerable population we serve." And she points out the "wasted time and money with these checks across state departments and agencies."]

Let's help the volunteers, the home care workers, the school staff, and our local organizations. I'd appreciate your aye vote.

¹ Criminal justice agencies are not included in this bill.