



Testimony
SB 5703 – Background Checks/Consumer Reports
Senate Human Services & Corrections Committee
February 17, 2011

Senator Hargrove and members of the Committee, my name is Denise Aubuchon. I am the Associate Director of Human Resources for the Archdiocese of Seattle and am testifying on behalf of the Washington State Catholic Conference which represents the Catholic Bishops of Washington State on issues of public policy. The Catholic Conference respectfully urges you to support the passage of **SB 5703**.

It is no secret that the issue of sexual abuse of children is one that the Catholic Church has had to address. In doing so, the Church has made a formal commitment to provide a safe environment for children, youth and vulnerable adults. We provide safe environment training and do background checks on every one of our employees and volunteers. A pre-employment criminal background check is one of the ways our parishes are able to screen out those individuals who by the very nature of their criminal history have the potential to harm persons including minors, individuals with developmental disabilities, and vulnerable adults.

We use a private background check vendor, CICS Employment Services, Inc., because it provides a more comprehensive report than a report we would receive from the Washington State Patrol Background Check Service (WATCH). This is because the State Patrol reports list only convictions which have occurred in the State of Washington. If an applicant has a conviction from any other state, the State Patrol cannot provide us with that information. A good example of this is a few years ago a parish had an applicant for a custodial position who indicated on his application that he had no prior convictions. When CICS ran his check, it was discovered that he had a prior conviction in another state for the rape of a child. The State Patrol would not have been able to provide us with that information.

Our background check vendor is able to determine an applicant's previous addresses in all states by using the applicant's social security number to identify where the individual has generated credit. For the purpose of criminal background screens, the vendor does not access the individual's credit report. They do, however, check court records in every jurisdiction where that individual has lived. This is to ascertain if the individual has a record of criminal conviction.

As a consumer reporting agency, the vendor is subject to RCW 19.182.040 which essentially prohibits it from reporting to us any criminal convictions older than seven years for applicants seeking positions paying less than \$20,000 per year. Many positions in our diocese are part time and pay less than \$20,000 per year. Most of these positions either require or allow an individual ongoing and unsupervised access to children, youth, developmentally disabled and vulnerable adults. There are many crimes which are relevant to the safety of these populations including: (a) violent crimes such as murder and felony assault, (b) sexual offenses, and (c) crimes against children or vulnerable adults such as abuse or neglect.

We urge you to pass SB 5703 so that organizations that use third party agencies may have access to complete criminal histories and better protect the vulnerable in our communities. We are joined in this request by many organizations and agencies providing services to vulnerable populations.

Thank you for your consideration of SB 5703.