

## The Becca Bill

The Juvenile Justice Act of 1977 decriminalized running away from home and established residential centers to care for young runaways. Unfortunately, the result was inadequate housing options which left many youth living on the streets.

In response to growing concern for these children, the Becca Bill was created by Governor Mike Lowry and Attorney General Christine Gregoire. Washington State's bill is named for a young Tacoma girl who was murdered in 1993 while living on the streets in Spokane.

The purpose of the bill is to "empower parents to help their children when they have run away or when their child's substance abuse or mental health problems place them in serious danger of harming themselves or others."

One aspect of the bill requires that all school districts track the number of student absences and notify parents when their children have violated attendance procedures.

Education has the potential to affect our children for the rest of their lives. Working together, we can design a plan to keep your child in school.



## The School Process

The Becca Bill is intended to stop truancy before it becomes a problem. The law requires schools to take the following actions:

### **One or Two Unexcused Absences**

After each unexcused absence the school is required to contact the parents by phone or letter. After two contacts, the school must schedule a conference with the parent and student to discuss solutions to the truancy problem.

### **Five Unexcused Absences**

If a student has five unexcused absences in a 30-day period, the school may file a petition with Pierce County Juvenile Court, asking the court to order the student to attend school.

### **Seven and Ten Unexcused Absences**

The school is required to file a petition with juvenile court if the student has seven unexcused absences in a 30-day period or ten unexcused absences in a school year.

## **RCW 28A.225 – Washington State Compulsory School Attendance and Admission Law**

## The Court Process

The first hearing in the truancy process is the fact-finding hearing. The student and parent attend an educational workshop at the Juvenile Court.

In cases where a determination of truancy is made, the student and parent will meet with a truancy probation officer after attending the truancy workshop. The student and parent will either sign a Truancy Intervention Agreement or ask for a contested hearing.

If unexcused absences have continued, the court will proceed with a truancy fact-finding court hearing. If the court determines the truancy statute has been met or the youth stipulates to the entry of a court order, an order compelling school attendance will be entered.

If unexcused absences continue after the entry of the order compelling school attendance, the student and/or parent can be summoned back to court for a contempt hearing.

If the student is found in contempt, the court may order consequences such as writing a report, obtaining a drug/alcohol evaluation, doing community service or spending time in juvenile detention.

The student is represented by an attorney at the fact-finding and contempt court hearings.

A parent held in contempt can be fined \$25 for each day their child has an unexcused absence.

## Mandatory Attendance

In the State of Washington, school attendance is required by law for all children ages 8 through 17 enrolled in public school. The law can also apply to children ages 6 and 7, if the parent enrolls a child in public school. Everyone should see to it that no child falls through the cracks.

As parents, you have a very difficult job trying to manage the lives of your children. There exists no greater challenge than addressing the many difficulties that will confront your children as they grow. However, one issue has the potential to affect them for the rest of their lives – their education. Let's work together to keep them in school.



**Questions?** If you have questions, or would like more information:

Contact your child's school

Visit the  
Sumner School District's Web site  
[www.sumnersd.org](http://www.sumnersd.org)

Call the  
Pierce County Juvenile Court  
(253) 798-7100

## Parent Resources

### Positive Steps Program

Educational Service District  
(425) 917-9839

*Support for families and youth working  
toward improving school attendance*

### At-Risk Youth Petition

Pierce County Juvenile Court  
(253) 798-7917  
(253) 798-7921

### Family Reconciliation Services

(253) 983-6100

*Help for families with  
children ages 13-17*

### Good Samaritan Community Services

Mental Health / Counseling  
(253) 697-8408

**CRISIS LINE: (253) 445-8145**

### Sumner Family Center

(253) 891-6535

*Information and referral for family  
support programs and resources*

### United Way Help Line

Dial '211' or (253) 572-4357

*Pierce County's information  
and referral line for  
health and human services resources*



**Sumner School District**  
*...a great place to learn!*

## A Parent's Guide to the

# BECCA Bill



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