

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESSB 5936

As Passed Senate, February 9, 1998

Title: An act relating to offender education.

Brief Description: Requiring a report on alternatives for increasing offender access to postsecondary academic and vocational opportunities.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Human Services & Corrections (originally sponsored by Senators Kohl, Long, Hargrove, Franklin, Bauer and Rasmussen).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections: 3/4/97, 3/5/97 [DPS].

Passed Senate, 3/17/97, 46-0.

Passed Senate, 2/9/98, 49-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5936 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Long, Chair; Zarelli, Vice Chair; Franklin, Hargrove, Kohl, Schow and Stevens.

Staff: Fara Daun (786-7459)

Background: In 1995, the Legislature adopted a law requiring the Department of Corrections (DOC) to prioritize its available resources to meet the following educational goals, specified in order of priority:

- (1) Achievement of basic academic skills through obtaining a high school diploma or its equivalent and achievement of vocational skills necessary for purposes of work programs and for an inmate to qualify for work upon release;
- (2) Additional work and education programs that are compatible with an offender's case management plan;
- (3) Other work and education programs as appropriate.

The 1995 legislation required DOC to develop a formula by which inmates would contribute to the cost of certain educational and vocational programs, based on their ability to pay. The formula requires offenders to pay a portion of the costs or tuition for any second or subsequent vocational program associated with their work programs and any A.A. or B.A. programs that are part of their case management plans. The formula also requires offenders to pay all costs and tuition of any post-secondary academic program and any second or subsequent vocational program that is not part of their case management plan.

As a result of these statutory priorities, which were implemented in the context of a 5 percent reduction in the department's education budget, most postsecondary academic programs have been eliminated from state correctional institutions. Many vocational programs were also reduced or eliminated that were determined to have insufficient linkages to correctional industries work programs or employment opportunities upon release.

It has been suggested that the elimination of postsecondary academic opportunities and the reduction of many vocational opportunities is not in the long-term best interests of many offenders who need such programs to reduce idleness and make positive changes upon release. It has been further suggested that efforts should be made to test the viability of fee-based courses.

Summary of Bill: The Department of Corrections is required to prepare a report to the Legislature by December 1, 1998, on alternatives for increasing offender access to post-secondary academic and vocational programs. The report is to be prepared in consultation with representatives from the community colleges and other educational service providers currently contracting with the department.

The report must present alternatives for increasing access within existing resources as well as alternatives that may require additional funding. Such alternatives must include an implementation plan for pilot projects utilizing fee-based programs, and may include recommendations on correspondence and video tele-courses and the feasibility and desirability of connecting department facilities to the K-20 technology network.

An exemption is made to the mandatory deductions requirement in current law to exclude funds received by the department on behalf of offenders for payment of one fee-based education or vocational program that is associated with an inmate's work program or a placement decision made by the department to prepare an inmate for work upon release.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: The department and the community colleges welcome the opportunity to explore, collaboratively, alternatives to increase offenders' access to post-secondary academic and vocational opportunities. The department's shift in focus to basic skills as a result of HB 2010 (1995) has diminished the opportunity for those offenders who could benefit from participating in post-secondary academic study.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: PRO: Dr. Ruben Cedeño, Director, Division of Offender Programs, Department of Corrections; Ron Crossland, Associate Director, State Board for Community & Technical Colleges; Jean Stewart, Administrator for Educational Services, Department of Corrections; Jack Roos, citizen volunteer, member of Correctional Industries Advisory Board.