

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2055

As Reported By House Committee On:

Higher Education

Title: An act relating to higher educational opportunities for children who have been in foster care.

Brief Description: Creating the foster care scholarship program.

Sponsors: Representatives Kagi, O'Brien, Romero, Ogden, Lovick, Kenney, Stensen, Edmonds, Haigh, Schual-Berke, Ruderman, Wood, Constantine, Lantz and Santos.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 2/23/99, 3/2/99 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Creates a foster care scholarship program.
- The Higher Education Coordinating Board will administer the program.
- Recipients must be between 16 and 23 years of age and have been in foster care for at least six months since their 15th birthday.
- \$200,000 is requested for the 1999-2001 biennium.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Carlson, Republican Co-Chair; Kenney, Democratic Co-Chair; Lantz, Democratic Vice Chair; Radcliff, Republican Vice Chair; Edmonds and Gombosky.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Dunn and Esser.

Staff: Marilee Scarbrough (786-7196).

Background:

Foster care homes provide 24-hour care to children of all ages who need temporary out-of-home placement due to child abuse, neglect, or family conflict. Foster care is viewed as a short-term solution to an emergency situation. On any given day, there are approximately 11,000 children in Washington state foster care. There are 4,164 licensed foster homes providing care.

Foster care in Washington is constantly changing because of the numbers, ages, and problems of children entering foster care. Providing foster children with an opportunity for higher education is view as a means to add stability to their lives and break the cycle of child abuse, neglect, or family conflict that created their foster care situation.

Summary of Substitute Bill:**Eligibility Requirements**

Recipients must be between 16 and 23 years old, and have been in foster care a minimum of six months since their 15th birthday. Students must also be eligible for financial aid under the state student financial aid program. However, grants awarded under this program will not affect eligibility for state student financial aid. Grants may be used to attend a vocational program or an institution of higher education in Washington.

Students must enter a higher education program within three years of high school graduation and maintain satisfactory academic and attendance progress. Students remain eligible for four academic years. Students cannot pursue a degree in theology.

Appropriation Request

An appropriation of \$100,000 for each fiscal year is requested for the scholarship program.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The substitute reduces the appropriation from \$500,000 dollars per fiscal year to \$100,000 dollars per fiscal year. Foster children who successfully complete the general educational development test are also eligible for the scholarships. The substitute allows recipients to attend a vocational program. The minimum qualifying age is reduced from 18 to 16.

Appropriation: The sum of \$200,000.

Fiscal Note: Requested on original bill February 16, 1999.

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

Testimony For: (Original bill) For most foster children, the road to independence is far tougher given a background of abuse and neglect. At the age of 18, foster children have nowhere to go. They are completely on their own and must provide for their own care. There is a need to increase access to post-secondary education for foster children. Foster kids are good kids. This will create access for the disenfranchised. This will encourage foster children to stay in school. We encourage you to include private career schools and colleges. Some foster children may want to enter a two-year program. We are not sure private career schools and colleges are included in the bill.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: (In support) Representative Kagi, prime sponsor; Linda Johnson, foster/adoptive parent; Richard Peet, Foster Parents Association of Washington State; Tom Hostetler, foster parent; Elizabeth Babock, citizen; Ted Keyes, Foster Parents Association of Washington State; Jesse Salomon, Washington Student Lobby; Cheyenne Worthen, YMCA Independent Living Skills Program; Dani Turk, YMCA Independent Living Skills Program; and Carol Alber, Washington Federation of Private Career Schools and Colleges.

(In support with concerns) Bruce Botka, Higher Education Coordinating Board.