

HOUSE BILL ANALYSIS

HB 1923

Title: An act relating to postsecondary courses for inmates.

Brief Description: Establishing a postsecondary education program for inmates.

Sponsors: Representatives O'Brien, Koster, Anderson, Ogden, Lantz, Miloscia, Hankins and Ballasiotes.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND CORRECTIONS

Staff: Yvonne Walker (786-7841).

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 (HB 2010):

- (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; and
- (3) Other work and education programs as appropriate.

The 1995 legislation required the 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 post-secondary 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.

Summary:

The Department of Corrections is required to implement a one year pilot post-secondary educational program for inmates. The department must ensure that the pilot program tries to address all modes of instruction that inmates are eligible to use, including distance learning and other technologies.

The department must offer, through a RFP process (request for proposal), an opportunity for community and four-year colleges to provide post-secondary educational courses to inmates on a self-pay system. Although the department must provide any necessary space and administrative support to any college or university providing classes, each individual inmate is responsible for paying all costs and tuition associated with participating in the courses. Any funds saved in an inmate's personal inmate savings account may be used for paying for the courses.

The Department of Corrections must select one prison for females and one prison for males to implement the pilot program.

A report must be submitted to the Legislature by January 1, 2001 from the department and it must include recommendations regarding whether the pilot post-secondary educational program should be extended and stating the number of inmates who participated in the program.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 17, 1999.

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

Office of Program Research