

SENATE BILL REPORT

HB 1923

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Human Services & Corrections, April 1, 1999

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.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections: 4/1/99 [DPA].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators Hargrove, Chair; Costa, Vice Chair; Franklin, Kohl-Welles, Long, Patterson and Sheahan.

Staff: Lynn Hale (786-7430)

Background: In 1995 the Legislature adopted a law which requires the Department of Corrections (DOC) to prioritize its available resources to meet statutory education goals. Due to the required prioritization and a 5 percent reduction in the department's education budget, most postsecondary academic programs have been eliminated from state correctional institutions.

Summary of Amended Bill: DOC is required to implement a one-year pilot postsecondary 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 request for proposal (RFP) process, an opportunity for community and four-year colleges to provide postsecondary educational courses to inmates on a self-pay system. 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 must submit a report to the Legislature by January 1, 2001.

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill: The provision that the Department of Corrections may not preclude an inmate from participation in a postsecondary education course based on the inmate's release date or custody level was removed.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: Increased education is shown to reduce recidivism. The Department of Corrections supports the bill but has concerns regarding the implementation of the section that requires the department to not preclude any inmates based on release date or custody level. Allowing offenders that have been separated from the general population due to violent behavior to participate might endanger other inmates, prison, and college staff.

Concern exists that there is no incentive to entice colleges to participate in a pilot project.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: PRO: Representative O'Brien, prime sponsor; Bill Jaquette, Washington Defenders Association, Washington Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers; Ron Crossland, State Board of Community and Technical Colleges; Jean Stewart, Department of Corrections (concerns).