

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6783

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education, February 1, 2006

Title: An act relating to creating a scholarship for students entering mathematics and science professions.

Brief Description: Creating the qualified professions conditional scholarship.

Sponsors: Senators Shin, Pflug, Schmidt, McAuliffe, Berkey, Rockefeller, Eide, Delvin, Rasmussen and Kohl-Welles.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education: [DPS-WM]

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING, K-12 & HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6783 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators McAuliffe, Chair; Pridemore, Vice Chair, Higher Education; Weinstein, Vice Chair, Early Learning & K-12; Schmidt, Ranking Minority Member; Berkey, Carrell, Delvin, Eide, Kohl-Welles, Pflug, Rasmussen, Rockefeller, Schoesler and Shin.

Staff: Stephanie Yurcisin (786-7438)

Background: The Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board (HEC Board), created in 1985, administers the state's student financial aid programs and provides planning, coordination, monitoring, and policy analysis for higher education in Washington. Major functions of the board include: developing and monitoring a strategic master plan for higher education, developing and recommending policies to enhance public higher education, serving as an advocate for students and the higher education system, and administering student financial aid programs.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The Qualified Professions Conditional Scholarship Program, which will be administered by the HEC Board, is created.

To be eligible to receive the conditional scholarship, a student must:

- be registered for at least six credit hours (or the equivalent);
- have a 3.0 GPA at an institution of higher education;
- be a resident student;
- have declared a major in mathematics, engineering, or a physical or natural science; and
- have declared an intention to complete a program leading to a "qualified profession" in one of these fields. For the purposes of this program, a "qualified profession" is defined as a mathematics, engineering, physical science, or natural science profession.

To receive additional disbursements, the student must be considered by his or her institution of higher education to be in a satisfactory progress condition. A student may receive the conditional scholarship for a maximum of five years.

In administering the program, the HEC Board will select students to receive the scholarships, adopt necessary rules and guidelines, publicize the program, collect and manage repayments, and solicit and accept grants and donations for the program. The HEC Board is required to establish a selection committee for determining the recipients of the scholarship, and the criteria shall emphasize factors demonstrating excellence.

The HEC Board may award conditional scholarships to eligible students from appropriated funds or from other donations. The amount of the scholarship may not exceed the amount of tuition and fees at the student's institution of higher education or the resident undergraduate tuition at the University of Washington, whichever is lower.

If a scholarship recipient is not employed in a qualified profession for each year of scholarship received, he or she has an obligation to repay the outstanding amount of the scholarship, with interest. The maximum repayment period is ten years, while other details about the repayment will be set by the HEC Board.

A new account, the Qualified Professions Scholarship Account, is created in the custody of the State Treasurer. The HEC Board must deposit all funds received for this program into the account and has sole authority for disbursement authorizations. This self-sustaining account must consist of funds appropriated by the Legislature, private contributions to the program, and repayments of scholarships.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The substitute bill clarified that the relevant GPA is based on grades earned at higher education institutions and clarifies that the program is a conditional scholarship program, not a loan program.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 24, 2006.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Testimony For: Washington has a real problem in terms of the global market and global competitiveness arenas. The conditional nature of this scholarship (with terms including repayment for noncompliance) ensure that the students are serious. It is likely that private industry will also likely contribute funds for this cause. Conditional scholarships that have been targeted to health professionals and to teachers have helped the students in terms of knowing the requirements that need to be met; the more specificity the Legislature can provide in this regard for the qualified professions, the better. There is concern as to whether teaching math or science would qualify as a qualified profession for the purposes of the scholarship.

Testimony Against: None.

Who Testified: PRO: Senator Paul Shin, prime sponsor; John Klacik, Higher Education Coordinating Board; Jennifer Wallace, Professional Educator Standards Board; Bob Cooper, Washington Association of Colleges of Teacher Education.