

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 3047

As Reported by House Committee On:
Higher Education

Title: An act relating to cost savings on course materials.

Brief Description: Requiring disclosure of certain information relating to higher education course materials.

Sponsors: Representatives Armstrong, Newhouse and Upthegrove.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 1/30/08, 2/4/08 [DPA].

Brief Summary of Amended Bill

- Requires affiliated bookstores to disclose information on required course materials at least four weeks before the start of class.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Wallace, Chair; Sells, Vice Chair; Anderson, Ranking Minority Member; Hankins, Hasegawa, Jarrett, Schmick and Sommers.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives McIntire and Roberts.

Staff: Andi Smith (786-7304).

Background:

A 2005 study by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that since 1986, textbook prices have nearly tripled, increasing by 186 percent. The GAO reports that the price of textbooks has increased in recent years largely due to increases in costs associated with new features, such as Web sites and other instructional supplements. Publishers told the GAO they have increased their investments in the development of supplements to meet the demands of a changing postsecondary market.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Keeping current with consumers often entails reissuing editions with modernized text, graphics, and supplemental Web-content. According to a study conducted in California by the California Student Public Interest Research Group, the average release time between textbook editions is 3.8 years. Of the textbook surveyed, new editions cost 58 percent more than the older version, rising to an average cost of \$102.44 (in 2005).

Many students are buying both used and new books from sources outside the affiliated campus bookstore. Web sites like *Amazon*, *ECampus*, and *Cheapest Textbooks* are increasing in popularity, as is sourcing books from overseas Web sites, where the prices may be significantly cheaper for new books though doing so means longer shipping times and no return.

In 2006 the Legislature passed Substitute House Bill 3087 to give students at public four-year institutions more choices when purchasing educational materials and to encourage faculty and staff to work with bookstores and publishers to implement the least costly option to students without sacrificing educational content. In 2007 the Legislature passed House Bill 1224 which added community and technical colleges to the list of schools covered by the 2006 legislation.

Summary of Amended Bill:

Affiliated bookstores are required to disclose information on required course materials at least four weeks prior to the start of the class for which the materials are required. Course material information includes title, author(s), edition, price, and International Standard Book Number.

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The amended bill allows Chief Academic Officers to waive the disclosure requirements on a case-by-case basis, provided that students can reliably expect that nearly all information is available four weeks in advance.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The cost of buying books is very expensive, especially for families with multiple children in school. Online ordering is an effective way to save money on text books, but they take awhile to ship. All bookstores have ordering deadlines, so should be able to provide the information in advance. It is time to end the monopoly of the bookstore and start letting families find more cost-effective ways to source the course materials.

(With concerns) This bill would negatively impact the flexibility that institutions have in working with their professors. Often times, instructors change within one week of the start of class and in those cases, the college would already be out of compliance with the law. International Standard Book Numbers (ISBN) also change without providing notice to the bookstore, and the stores would then have inadvertently provided misinformation were the ISBN disclosed four weeks earlier. The bookstores want to make sure that they can avoid a student having to pay for a book that may no longer be required. Congress is also already addressing the issue.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Armstrong, prime sponsor; and Susan Aasen.

(With concerns) Julie Suchanek, The Evergreen State College; and Erin Brown, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.