

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESHB 1131

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Higher Education, March 21, 2007
Ways & Means, March 30, 2007

Title: An act relating to helping former foster care youth gain postsecondary education and providing scholarships to former foster care youth for this purpose.

Brief Description: Creating the passport to college promise program.

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Dunshee, Haler, Kenney, Fromhold, Priest, Roberts, Jarrett, Kagi, Hunt, McDermott, Haigh, Ormsby, Chase, Wallace, Hudgins, Schual-Berke, Simpson, Conway, Morrell, Moeller and Santos).

Brief History: Passed House: 3/06/07, 81-16.

Committee Activity: Higher Education: 2/15/07, 3/21/07 [DPA-WM].
Ways & Means: 3/30/07 [DPA].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Shin, Chair; Kilmer, Vice Chair; Delvin, Ranking Minority Member; Berkey and Schoesler.

Staff: Aldo Melchiori (786-7439)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators Prentice, Chair; Fraser, Vice Chair, Capital Budget Chair; Pridemore, Vice Chair, Operating Budget; Zarelli, Ranking Minority Member; Brandland, Carrell, Fairley, Hatfield, Hewitt, Hobbs, Honeyford, Keiser, Kohl-Welles, Oemig, Parlette, Rasmussen, Regala, Roach, Rockefeller, Schoesler and Tom.

Staff: Tim Yowell (786-7435)

Background: Various state agencies partner with the College Success Foundation and other nonprofit entities to create the Foster Care to College Partnership. This partnership coordinates its efforts to provide support services, information, and college scholarship aid to youth in permanent, state-supported foster care.

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.

The 2005 Legislature created an endowed scholarship program for financially needy foster care youth and former foster care youth ages 16 to 23 years who had been in the state's foster care system six months or longer since turning 14 years of age. The Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) publicizes and promotes the program to eligible students with the assistance of an advisory board. The amount of the award may not exceed the student's financial need.

In 2005, the duties of the Children's Administration Oversight Committee on Education of Foster Youth were expanded to include promotion of opportunities for foster youth to participate in postsecondary education or training. The HECB, when making awards of state need grants, was directed to give consideration to former foster youth.

In 2006, Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) was granted authority to allow up to 50 youth reaching 18 years of age to continue in foster care to participate in or complete a post-high school academic or vocational program and to receive necessary support and transition services. In 2007 and 2008, 50 additional youth per year may be permitted to continue to remain in foster or group care after reaching the age of 18 to complete post-high school academic or vocational programs.

Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill: The Passport to College Promise Program (Program) is created. To be eligible for the Program, a student must: (1) have been in foster care for at least one year since his/her 14th birthday; (2) be enrolled on at least a half-time basis; (3) maintain satisfactory academic progress; (4) be between age 16 and 26; (5) be a resident of Washington; (6) not have earned a bachelor's or professional degree; and (7) not be pursuing a degree in theology.

The institution attended by the student first provides the student with all aid for which the student qualifies, then provides a supplemental scholarship to the student so the entire amount of the student's cost of attendance is covered. The scholarships to eligible foster youth cover the first five consecutive years of an eligible student's undergraduate education. The scholarships can be used at any Washington institution of higher education (including accredited private schools). The maximum award is the annual cost of attendance where the student is enrolled, or the cost of attendance at the University of Washington, whichever is lower, plus up to \$1,000 for reasonable additional expenses.

Two- and four-year colleges and universities in Washington receive \$3,500 annually for each former foster youth who earns 45 quarter or 30 semester credits from the school. Another \$2,500 is provided for every additional 45 quarter/30 semester credits earned by the former foster youth (up to 90 quarter/60 semester units at a two-year school and 180 quarter/120 semester units at a four-year school).

The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) creates and maintains a website to provide comprehensive information to foster youth regarding opportunities for higher education. The DSHS contracts with at least one non-governmental entity to provide supplemental educational transition planning to foster care youth beginning at age 14.

The SBCTC and the HECB submit a joint report to the Legislature by January 15, 2010, regarding the number of students who have received scholarships under this program and those students' academic progress.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY RECOMMENDED STRIKING AMENDMENT(S) AS PASSED COMMITTEE (Higher Education): It is clarified that the award for the student's reasonable expenses may not exceed \$1,000 if the student is attending full-time. It is further clarified that the student may receive additional awards for expenses from other sources.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY RECOMMENDED STRIKING AMENDMENT(S) AS PASSED COMMITTEE (Ways & Means): The striking amendment does not include the finding that the state has the same responsibility as a non-custodial parent to a youth who has been in foster care during his or her adolescence. The program is a six-year pilot scheduled to expire June 30, 2013, after an outcomes evaluation by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy. Students eligible for scholarships and student support services are those who emancipate from foster care at age 18, after having spent at least one year in care after their 16th birthday. The maximum annual supplemental scholarship amount is equal to tuition and fees at the highest-priced state college or university. The DSHS is to establish procedures for helping the HECB and institutions of higher education identify students who are eligible for assistance under the program. The HECB, rather than the SBCTC, is responsible for developing a foster youth-specific website on college admission and financial aid processes, timelines, and resources.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Higher Education): PRO: Currently, this House version of the bill more closely resembles the original intent of the drafters. We need to open the doors of higher education to former foster children. Unless colleges get financial incentives to recruit and retain these students, the program is much less likely to be successful.

Persons Testifying (Higher Education): PRO: Reuven Carlyle, SBCTC; Betty Gebhardt, HECB; Lily Wilson-Codesa, Youth Literacy Project.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Ways & Means: on companion SB 5155): PRO: This bill is necessary because a child who has spent time in foster care is more than twice as likely to end up in prison as in college. The goal of the legislation is to "cast a broad net," because so few former foster care children presently make it to college. National research suggests that at most 10-20 percent of foster care kids go on to college. It is important to take a comprehensive approach, which doesn't just provide foster kids the direct financial aid they need to go to college, but also gives colleges and universities incentives and resources to help those kids succeed in college once they get there.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Senator Kilmer, prime sponsor; Reuven Carlyle, State Board for Community & Technical Colleges; Janis Avery, Treehouse for Kids.