

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6790

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Human Services & Corrections, February 01, 2008

Title: An act relating to creating a pilot program for the education of inmates.

Brief Description: Creating a pilot program for the postsecondary education of inmates.

Sponsors: Senators Hargrove, Stevens, Regala, Shin, Kline and Kohl-Welles.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections: 1/25/08, 2/01/08 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6790 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Hargrove, Chair; Regala, Vice Chair; Stevens, Ranking Minority Member; Brandland, Carrell, Marr and McAuliffe.

Staff: Shani Bauer (786-7468)

Background: The Joint Legislative Task Force on Offenders Programs, Sentencing & Supervision convened in 2006. Among other recommendations, the Task Force recommended that the Legislature eliminate barriers to offender participation in vocational training and post-secondary education and increase the availability of education and vocational training when the programming is linked to an offender's individual reentry plan.

In 2007 the Legislature required the Department of Corrections (DOC) to develop an individual reentry plan for every offender committed to the jurisdiction of DOC. An individual reentry plan is designed to address both the risks and the needs of the offender, and includes an assessment of the offender's current educational skill level and future need for education or vocational training.

DOC will provide basic academic skills to offenders in obtaining a high school diploma or its equivalent; vocational training necessary to participate in a work program or obtain work upon release; and additional work and education programs necessary for compliance with an offender's individual reentry plan (except post-secondary education).

Other appropriate vocational, work or education programming that does not meet the above requirements must be paid for by the inmate according to a sliding scale formula or may be paid by a third party. These payments are not subject to mandatory deductions.

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.

To the extent that funding is provided, the Legislature also created a postsecondary education degree program within DOC. An inmate must either pay for the program or have it funded through a third party. DOC is authorized to accept any grants or donations to provide postsecondary education to inmates..

Summary of Bill (Recommended Substitute): A pilot program is established for the purpose of assessing the impact of inmate participation in two-year postsecondary education degree programs. DOC must select two sites for operation of the program, giving priority to those institutions that have had recent contracts with accredited community colleges to provide postsecondary educational services.

The educational program must be an associate of arts degree program or be intended to provide the first two years of the equivalent of a baccalaureate degree program. Priority must be given to community colleges that have demonstrated the potential to contribute nonstate resources to the pilot, such as volunteer staff.

In selecting inmates eligible to participate, priority should be given to inmates whose individual reentry plan includes postsecondary education degree program participation and who have between two and four years of their term of incarceration left at the commencement of the program. Inmates may not be required to pay for participation.

The pilot program must begin by March 1, 2009 and extend for four fiscal years. DOC may accept donations and grants to operate the program.

The Washington State Institute for Public Policy must evaluate the pilot program to determine whether it is cost effective and results in better outcomes for participating inmates. A preliminary report is due to the Governor and the Legislature by December 1, 2015, with the final report due September 30, 2018.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS COMMITTEE (Recommended Substitute): Requires DOC to select a representative sampling of inmates with varying risk levels and backgrounds for participation in the post-secondary education program to ensure a reliable and complete recidivism reduction analysis.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 21, 2008.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill: PRO: This is a good bill. Short term training is only a first step and does not fully prepare an offender to be a contributing member of society. Studies on prisoners and higher education have found that the recidivism rate goes down the more education the person receives. Incidentally, recidivism rates do not go down with a GED. It will be wonderful if we can show the recidivism reduction of these types of programs. Those prisoners who participate in post-secondary education are better role models for other prisoners and violence rates go down as a result. Education also enables offenders to be better role models for their children and better support systems for their families. Too long we have treated offenders as non-persons. Education is the key out of poverty. Once you

educate offenders, they are also better able to assist other offenders in moving forward to make the right choices.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Dr. Gary Murrell, Laurie Clary, Grays Harbor College; Kimberly Mays, Ari Kohn, Post Prison Education Program; Tim Boutz, Walla Walla Community College; Kathy Goebel, State Board of Community & Technical Colleges.