

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5176

As of March 3, 2009

Title: An act relating to creating a bi-state partnership for teachers of children with visual impairments.

Brief Description: Creating a bi-state partnership for teachers of children with visual impairments.

Sponsors: Senators Shin, Kastama, McAuliffe, Rockefeller, Jarrett, Pridemore, Hobbs, Delvin, Keiser, Hatfield, Kilmer, Jacobsen and Roach.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education & Workforce Development: 2/18/09, 2/20/09 [DPS-WM].

Ways & Means: 2/27/09.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5176 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Kilmer, Chair; Jarrett, Vice Chair; Becker, Ranking Minority Member; Hewitt, Kastama, McAuliffe, Shin and Stevens.

Staff: Wendy Malkin (786-7434)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Staff: Tim Yowell (786-7435)

Background: Currently, there are no in-state teacher preparation programs specifically for teachers of students who are vision impaired. The closest program is at Portland State University in Portland, Oregon. Portland State University offers a graduate-level program for the preparation of teachers of students who are vision impaired. The program is offered almost entirely online, except for one on-campus summer session.

Summary of Bill: The bill as referred to committee not considered.

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.

Summary of Bill (Proposed Second Substitute): To the extent that funds are available, the position of vision impairments/orientation and mobility coordinator is established and housed at Washington State University in Vancouver. The purpose of the coordinator is to create a partnership between Portland State University and Washington State University to address Washington's need for teachers of students who are vision impaired. The coordinator's responsibilities include recruiting students, developing partnerships with Washington school districts that provide services to students who are vision impaired, supervising enrolled students, serving as a liaison between Portland State University and Washington State University, instructing in the orientation and mobility curriculum as an adjunct faculty, and seeking grants and funding sources for the program.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY WAYS & MEANS COMMITTEE (Proposed Second Substitute): The position is only established to the extent that funds are available from specific state appropriations or other sources.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not Requested.

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 & Workforce Development):
PRO: Washington is behind other states in providing training for teachers for students who are visually impaired. WSU can pursue the private funding to get the money until the state is able to afford to support the program. We need to be fair to all human beings. I am in elementary school, and I am blind, and I can read, use a computer well, and walk on my own with a cane. My orientation teacher helps me learn how to cross streets. I can do these things because I have had a well-trained teacher since the beginning of my education. My family moved to a new town, but my mom still has to drive me to my old school so I can continue with a trained teacher. There are no teachers for students who are visually impaired at my new school. I am a high school student who is blind. Early in my education my family lived in an area with trained teachers. After we moved, I spent many years without a teacher specifically trained to work with blind students, and I have fallen behind my peers. It is very important for students who are visually impaired to have skilled teachers who can teach special skills such as braille. It is also important to have teachers trained in mobility orientation to teach students how to cross streets and physically navigate on their own. We are visually impaired, but please don't make us academically delayed because of lack of trained teachers. Washington is not keeping up with other states in services; we do not have enough teachers. A lot of students do not receive services at all. Some students receive less than recommended services. Washington does not have a program for teachers of the visually impaired, and there are often open positions for these teachers that cannot be filled. Last year there was a bill for a needs assessment and that asked for the Professional Educators Standards Board to recognize out of state programs. The bill did not pass, but it raised recognition. Last year the Professional Educator Standards Board recognized an endorsement for teachers of the visually impaired, but the board needs an instate program.

We have a promise statement from WSU to start the program if it has funding. WSU has been involved in bringing this proposal forward.

Persons Testifying (Higher Education & Workforce Development): PRO: Tabitha Smith, student at Bellingham Elementary School; Kayla Day, student at Nooksack High School; John Glenn, Bellingham School District; Denise Colley, Washington Council for the Blind; Jamie Baggett, Teachers of the Visually Impaired; Emily Stevenson, student at University Place School District.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony On First Substitute Bill (Ways & Means): PRO: We need more teachers who are equipped with the special training and skills needed to teach children who are blind or visually impaired.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Senator Shin, prime sponsor.