

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5778

As of February 24, 2009

Title: An act relating to disclosure of course material information for higher education courses.

Brief Description: Requiring disclosure of certain course material information for higher education courses.

Sponsors: Senators Oemig, Swecker and Kilmer.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education & Workforce Development: 2/20/09.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Staff: Wendy Malkin (786-7434)

Background: A 2005 study conducted by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) stated that college textbook prices nearly tripled from December 1986 to December 2004. These prices increased by 186 percent, while tuition and fees increased by 240 percent, and overall inflation was 72 percent during the same time period. The GAO study attributes textbook cost increases to several factors. The primary reason the cost of textbooks has increased in recent years is because of "bundling," which is the addition of supplemental materials, such as CD-ROMs. Another factor cited in the study was the frequent revision of textbooks.

Each of the six public baccalaureate institutions in the state is affiliated with a bookstore. In 2006 the Legislature passed legislation requiring the boards of regents of the state universities, regional universities, and The Evergreen State College to work with affiliated bookstores, students, and faculty representatives to adopt rules for affiliated bookstores and rules directing faculty to consider price when assigning course materials. In 2007 the Legislature added community and technical colleges to the list of schools covered by the 2006 legislation.

The 2008 Higher Education Act requires institutions of higher education to disclose the International Standard Book Number and retail price for course materials on the institutions' internet course schedules, if it is practicable to do so.

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.

Many students buy both used and new books from sources outside the affiliated campus bookstore. Textbooks are often available from websites for significantly cheaper prices than in the bookstore, but ordering from a website can mean longer shipping times and no returns.

Summary of Bill: Affiliated bookstores must disclose information on required course materials at least two 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. The requirement may be waived on a case-by-case basis if students can reliably expect that nearly all of the information will be available four weeks before the start of class.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 13, 2009.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: We should not balance the budget by charging high amounts for textbooks. Textbooks are very expensive, and students need the notice to find cheaper books. Students on financial aid do not get help with the cost of textbooks, and it is very hard for these students to afford the books. This bill is a way to help these students without spending state dollars. It is important for students to have the ISBN number to find the correct book. We support the bill if a provision can be added that would encourage faculty to consider adopting free, open textbooks when available.

CON: Faculty are very aware of the high cost of books and materials. They would really like to help students. However, sometimes faculty are hired at a moment's notice, and these faculty should not be held to the requirements of the bill. Part-time faculty often do not have enough notice about their courses to comply with this bill.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Oemig, prime sponsor; Lenn Lund, student at Centralia College; Jennifer Lund, student at Centralia College; John Spiegeberg, student at Centralia College; Matthew Holmes, Washington Student Lobby; Steve Dupont, Central Washington University; Kayeri Akweks, SBCTC.

CON: Wendy Rader-Konofalski, WEA; Bernal Baca, AFT.