
Higher Education Committee

HB 1551

Brief Description: Changing the structure and scope of higher education institutions' technology transfer funding programs and operations in the state.

Sponsors: Representatives Anderson and Hudgins.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Adds regional universities and community and technical college Centers of Excellence to the membership of the Washington Technology Center.
- Reduces the number of board members on the Washington Technology Center Board from 25 to 14.
- Adds a focus for the Washington Technology Center activities on private sector job creation, regional economic development, and the development of relationships between higher education institutions and industry.
- Eliminates the Spokane Intercollegiate Research and Technology Institute and transfers its functions to the Washington Technology Center.
- Eliminates provisions for the Washington Technology Center to provide a forum for public and private collaborative initiatives to promote renewable energy and energy efficiency sectors in the state.

Hearing Date: 3/2/11

Staff: Madeleine Thompson (786-7304).

Background:

Technology Transfer.

Technology transfer is the process by which universities commercialize their research by allowing businesses to turn the academic research into new technologies. In return, universities collect licensing fees or royalties, or a part of the ownership stake in a product.

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 Washington Technology Center.

The Washington Technology Center (WTC) was established by the Legislature in 1983 to facilitate collaboration between the state's research universities and the technology industry. The WTC performs and commercializes research on a statewide basis with the purpose of creating intermediate and long-term economic benefits for Washington. The WTC is also directed to conduct research that is of primary interest to Washington-based companies and state economic development programs in order to strengthen public/private collaboration. Amongst other duties, the WTC establishes priorities for the selection and funding of research projects as well as approves and allocates funding for research projects that it conducts internally. The WTC is administered by a board of directors appointed by the Governor that includes 14 industry members, eight university members, and four ex officio members.

Summary of Bill:

The WTC is expanded to include regional universities, The Evergreen State College, and the community and technical college Centers of Excellence. The WTC is housed in two locations: one in Western Washington in King County and one in Eastern Washington in the Spokane area. Private sector job creation is added to the mission and key activities of the WTC.

Elimination of the Spokane Intercollegiate Research and Technology Institute (SIRTI).

The SIRTI is eliminated. All provisions and references to SIRTI in the Code are removed. Functions formerly performed by SIRTI must be transferred to the WTC, to the extent practicable.

Role of the WTC Board of Directors.

The current 25 member board is reduced to a 14 member board with representation from science, technology, engineering, and mathematics related industries and higher education institutions. A representative from The Department of Commerce must serve as an ex officio member. The board must establish priorities for the selection and funding of research projects that will promote sustainable job creation. The board must also identify barriers to commercialization and develop performance metrics by which WTC funded projects can be measured.

Support from Participating Institutions.

All state institutions of higher education that collaborate with the WTC, including Centers of Excellence at the community and technical colleges, are expected to provide support to the WTC.

Department of Commerce.

Current law directs the Department of Commerce to contract with the University of Washington for state-appropriated funds for the operation of the WTC, and to guide the WTC related to expending these funds and developing its strategic plan. This arrangement is revised so that the Department of Commerce may contract with a qualified independent third party. The Department of Commerce remains responsible to the Legislature for the WTC's contractual performance.

In State and Regional Job Creation.

For every job created outside of Washington that exceeds the number of jobs created in Washington, grantees must repay an amount to the WTC equal to ten percent of salary and

benefits for those positions for an eight year period. The total repayment amount cannot exceed the amount invested by the WTC.

Availability of Facilities.

To prioritize scarce resources, the WTC must make its facilities and resources available to the other collaborating institutions of higher education.

Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy.

Current statute directs the WTC to provide a forum for public and private collaborative initiatives to promote renewable energy and energy efficiency sectors in the state. These provisions are eliminated. The WTC is no longer directed to pursue a strategic plan for renewable energy and energy efficiency.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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