

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5217

As of February 8, 2011

Title: An act relating to appointing student members on the board of trustees for community colleges.

Brief Description: Allowing appointment of student members on the boards of trustees of community colleges.

Sponsors: Senators Shin, White, Nelson, Sheldon, Murray, Delvin, Rockefeller, Harper, Kline, Keiser, Conway, Chase, Eide and Fraser.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education & Workforce Development: 2/04/11.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Staff: Kimberly Cushing (786-7421)

Background: The University of Washington, Washington State University, the regional universities, and The Evergreen State College all have student members on their boards of regents or boards of trustees. There are no student members on the boards for any of the community college districts.

Boards at community and technical colleges have five trustees. Districts containing technical colleges must include at least one member from business and another from labor.

Summary of Bill: By a majority vote, the boards of trustees in any college district may establish a sixth trustee position to be filled by a full-time student in good standing. The student trustee is selected, by the Governor, from a list of three-to-five candidates submitted by the student government of that college district and serves a one-year term or until the student member's successor is appointed and qualified, whichever is later. The student must excuse himself or herself from participation or voting on matters relating to the hiring, discipline, or tenure of faculty members and personnel.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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.

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: Many question why students should participate on a board of trustees. The students are on average much older than students at four-year institutions. Student input is very necessary for a good education. The experience students get they can later use in public service. The student perspective is a central part of the decision-making process. They provide an insight that cannot be shared in reports. Students are easily accessible peers on campus, and make all the difference between communication with the board. Student trustees have voted for higher tuition; they understand the responsibility of the university to the state. A student is an equal member on the board. This bill is a high priority for community and technical college (CTC) students because it will improve their representation on the board, and helps develop a better relationship between the administration and the students. Amendments that we suggest include exempting students from collective bargaining and ensuring the student is full-time in good standing throughout the term. Bellevue Community College is willing to serve as a pilot if it will help advance the bills passage. Safety is a big concern but you wouldn't have that perspective without being on campus. Students are intimately familiar with issues such as financial aid. Trustees don't know about the garbage cans, seating, lighting, and smells that students know about. The message being sent is that you don't count as a community college student without a vote. Having a representative on the board of trustees for a community college makes sense for alignment, because a majority of students that transfer to four-year institutions are from community colleges. The language of bill is permissive and incremental and builds in checks and balances. If a school doesn't have student government, end of story because there is no way to recommend a trustee. The Governor's Office has a wonderful process to recommend trustees. No matter how sophisticated you are, everyone learns something from the process. There are no problems of prejudice in other board meetings with students. Students are quick to study and know a great deal already. Student trustees get materials ahead of the meeting, which enhances the conversation. This is a way to strengthen an already effective CTC system. Every board should have student voice.

CON: This is not a question of student capability. The boards get direct input from students in every college. At Olympic College, the ASB president sits at the table with the board. The only thing they don't have is vote, but they certainly have a voice that is virtually equal to other members. We should take great pride in CTC system, it is one of greatest in the nation. The structure of community college is different from the four-years because they need to be different. The job and mission is to provide for the workforce. The four-year institutions have a statewide responsibility; thus, their board should be larger. If the community college boards were to increase in size they would lose the chemistry that they have.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Shin, prime sponsor; Ben Henry, Frances Youn, UW students; Rose Brittain, Stanley Wong, Bellevue College students; Robert Stevens, Washington State Labor Council; Marsha Ruddle Buly, Western Washington Faculty University; Mike Merz, Central Washington University; Steve Lindstrom, Iris Maute-Gibson, Alex Clardy, Washington Student Assn.

CON: Pete Crane, Trustees Assn., Olympic College Trustees.