

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2587

As Reported by House Committee On: Higher Education

Title: An act relating to a tuition and fees exemption for children and surviving spouses of certain highway workers.

Brief Description: Creating a tuition and fees exemption for children and surviving spouses of certain highway workers.

Sponsors: Representatives Moscoso, Orcutt, Seaquist, Zeiger, Pollet, Reykdal, Hayes, Morrell, Ryu, Clibborn, Bergquist and Freeman.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 2/4/14, 2/5/14 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Adds children and surviving spouses of certain highway workers to the list of students who must receive waivers of tuition fees, and services and activities fees at state and regional universities, and The Evergreen State College.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 14 members: Representatives Seaquist, Chair; Pollet, Vice Chair; Zeiger, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Gregerson, Hansen, Johnson, Muri, Reykdal, Sawyer, Sells, Tarleton, Walkinshaw, Walsh and Wylie.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Halder, Ranking Minority Member; Magendanz, Scott and Smith.

Staff: Megan Wargacki (786-7194).

Background:

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.

State law permits or requires state universities, regional universities, The Evergreen State College, and community colleges to provide tuition and fee waivers to certain individuals.

Under certain conditions, the following individuals must be given tuition and fee waivers to attend a post-secondary institution: wrongly convicted persons and their children; Washington Scholar students; children and spouses of eligible veteran or National Guard members; and children and spouses of law enforcement officers, firefighters, or state patrol officers who lost their lives or became totally disabled in the line of duty.

Under certain conditions, the following individuals may be given tuition and fee waivers to attend a post-secondary institution: students, ages 19 and older, who are taking classes to complete their high school education; students age 60 and older; Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education students; certain foreign nationals; state employees, teachers, and other certified instructional staff; eligible veterans or National Guard members; students from Oregon, Idaho, and Canadian British Columbia; dislocated forest product workers or their unemployed spouses; and others.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The list of students who must receive waivers of all tuition fees and services and activities fees at state universities, regional universities, and The Evergreen State College is modified to include:

- children and surviving spouses of highway workers; and
- children and surviving spouses of highway workers employed by a transportation agency.

Definitions are provided for the terms "highway worker" and "transportation agency:"

- "Highway worker" means active employees of a transportation agency and supervisory highway maintenance and construction personnel.
- "Transportation agency" means any agency, department, or division of a local or state government that is primarily concerned with the construction, maintenance and operation of highways, roads, and ferries. However, a transportation agency does not include a government contractor.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill changes the definition of "transportation agency" to provide that the agency have as its primary function the construction, maintenance and operation of highways, roads, and ferries, rather than the construction and maintenance of highways and roads.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This bill would help people that face certain types of threats and it is important to help them. There may be other types of workers who could also be interested in tuition waivers. Highway workers jeopardize their safety to increase the safety of the traveling public. They do their jobs in all weather conditions to keep the roads maintained and safe. Highway workers work as flaggers, surveyors, and construction inspectors. Although progress has been made to increase the safety of these workers and the fatality rates have decreased overtime, these workers are still vulnerable to nature and to passing motorists. Their safety cannot be guaranteed, but this bill would provide some comfort to workers and their families that if tragedy strikes. With all the accompanying loss that comes with a tragedy, they would not have to lose their opportunity to go to college.

Since 1950, 59 Department of Transportation (DOT) employees have lost their lives in the line of duty. Some nonprofit organizations provide support to individuals and their families who are killed or injured, including children of killed DOT employees. Some children of highway workers killed during transportation work want a college education so they can obtain a living wage job. It is a great idea to help the family of any state employee who falls in the line of duty. The risks transportation workers face every day are real. Fallen workers leave behind families who find it difficult to make ends meet, let alone provide for a college education. It seems fair and reasonable that transportation workers would receive the same support as state patrol officers, firefighters, and law enforcement officers.

(In support with concerns) The bill should include tuition waivers for state and county ferry workers, particularly those that work around vehicles.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Moscoso, prime sponsor; Vince Oliveri, Professional and Technical Employees Local 17; Bill Ford, Department of Transportation Memorial Foundation; Matt Zuvich, Washington Federation of State Employees; and Chris Christopher, Department of Transportation.

(In support with concerns) Gordon Baxter, Puget Sound Metal Trades Council, Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association, International Organization of Masters, Mates and Pilots, and Inlandboatmen's Union.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.