

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6344

As of February 27, 2014

Title: An act relating to inmate postsecondary education degree programs to reduce recidivism.

Brief Description: Addressing the implementation of inmate postsecondary education degree programs to reduce recidivism.

Sponsors: Senators Hargrove, Kohl-Welles, Mullet, Schoesler and Kline.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections: 2/06/14.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Staff: Shani Bauer (786-7468)

Background: The Department of Corrections (DOC) will provide basic academic skills to offenders in obtaining a high school diploma or its equivalent, including English as a second language; vocational training necessary to participate in a work program or obtain work upon release; and additional work and education programs necessary for compliance with an offender's individual reentry plan. DOC is explicitly prohibited from paying for postsecondary education. Any inmate expressing interest in postsecondary courses must self-pay for the costs of a postsecondary education degree program or pay by receiving funding from a third party.

DOC has developed a process for offenders interested in participating in self-paid postsecondary academic, vocational, and theology programs through correspondence education involving an educational course or series of classes necessary to obtain or achieve a proficiency standard. Courses are completed through the mail with an accredited educational institution that meets all criteria necessary to gain accreditation recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, or one of the approved accrediting commissions or councils listed in DOC's policy.

The Rand Corporation completed a meta-analysis on the effectiveness of correctional education in 2013. After examining the higher-quality research studies, they found that, on average, inmates who participated in correctional education programs had a 43 percent lower odds of recidivating than inmates who did not. They found notable effects across all levels of education, from adult basic education and General Education Development programs to

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postsecondary and vocational education programs. The Washington State Institute for Public Policy has also analyzed the effectiveness of correctional education and determined that basic and postsecondary educational programming returns \$19.62 for every dollar spent and vocational education returns \$13.21 for every dollar spent. The studies are not specific enough to separate out the effect on recidivism and cost effectiveness of postsecondary education on its own.

Summary of Bill: The Legislature recognizes there is a positive correlation between education opportunities and reduced recidivism and therefore intends to offer appropriate postsecondary opportunities to inmates. DOC is no longer prohibited from paying for postsecondary education degree programs and may implement a program to provide postsecondary education within available resources.

An inmate may be selected to participate in a state-funded postsecondary degree program based on priority determined by DOC. Inmates not meeting DOC's priority criteria may elect to participate in a postsecondary education program if the inmate pays the costs of the program or receives funding from a third party.

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: PRO: Nine colleges provide programming through various areas of the state. Education is one of the best investments in our portfolio of programming to assist in reducing recidivism. DOC has been challenged in using the \$16 million allotment for programming for basic education and vocational education. We have already reached a good percentage of the population with basic education requirements and have graduated approximately 188 offenders in post-secondary education using \$280,000 of private funding. DOC would like to use state resources to provide that programming. We know that those released from prison need all the tools they can get to be competitive in getting employment. There are volumes of research in using educational programming to reduce recidivism. The higher level of education attained, the lower the level of recidivism.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Bob Cooper, Post Prison Education Program; Marty Brown, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Ed Brewster, Grays Harbor College; Bernie Warner, DOC; Steven Aldrich, Friends Committee on WA Public Policy; Theresa Power-Drutis, New Connections.