

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6370

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Higher Education, February 6, 2014

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: Senators King, Eide and Kohl-Welles.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education: 2/04/14, 2/06/14 [DPS-WM, w/oRec].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6370 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Bailey, Chair; Kohl-Welles, Ranking Member; Frockt, McAuliffe and Tom.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senator Becker, Vice Chair.

Staff: Kimberly Cushing (786-7421)

Background: Under current law, children and surviving spouses of law enforcement officers, firefighters, or Washington State Patrol officers who lost their life or became totally disabled in the line of duty are exempt from tuition, services, and activities fees at public four-year institutions of higher education.

In fiscal year 2012, 44 such students received a tuition waiver for a total cost of approximately \$230,000.

Summary of Bill (Recommended Substitute): The four-year institutions of higher education must exempt from the payment of tuition, services, and activities fees, children or surviving spouses of any highway worker who lost their life or became totally disabled in the line of duty as a highway worker while employed by a transportation agency. Children

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receive the exemption only if they begin their course of study at a public institution within ten years of their graduation from high school.

Highway worker is defined as a person who is (1) an employee of a transportation agency; or (2) a supervisory highway maintenance and construction personnel. Transportation agency is defined as an agency, department, or division of a unit of local government, separate from a transit agency, with its primary function being the construction, maintenance, and operation of Washington's highways and roads or ferries. A transportation agency does not include a government contractor.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE (Recommended Substitute): Clarifies that a transportation agency has as its primary function the construction, maintenance, and operation of ferries in addition to roads and highways. Makes a technical correction to clarify the definition of highway worker.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill: PRO: When we look at exemptions we have provided for law enforcement and firefighters, it is only fair we should do the same for those who put their lives in danger in the line of duty out on the highway, not at a desk. Over the last 20 years, six individuals have passed away under circumstances such as being run over, crushed by falling trees, or drowning. The goal is that this benefit would never be needed. Highway workers work to keep roads safe in all types of weather conditions. We can never totally guarantee the safety of workers just as those in the underlying statute. But if tragedy does strike, the dream of higher education does not have to be lost for their survivors. The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) Memorial Foundation was established in 2010 to provide assistance to families of fallen workers and comes from employee contributions. We have identified six children that will be eligible for higher education in the next few years. We would like to explicitly add the workers of the ferry system to the bill. There has been one ferry employee killed in the line of duty since 1950.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator King, prime sponsor; Matt Zuvich, WA Federation of State Employees; Vince Oliveri, Professional & Technical Employees Local 17; Bill Ford, WSDOT Memorial Foundation; Gordon Baxter, Inland Boatman's Union, Masters Mates & Pilots, Marine Engineers' Beneficial Assn., Puget Sound Metals Trades Council; Chris Christopher, WSDOT, Director of Maintenance Operations.