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## Higher Education Committee

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### HB 1958

**Brief Description:** Limiting the cost of assigned textbooks for institutions of higher education.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Zeiger, Pollet, Haler, Stambaugh, Hargrove, Magendanz, Buys and Bergquist.

<p><b>Brief Summary of Bill</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Limits the cost of an assigned textbook to no more than \$100.</li></ul>
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**Hearing Date:** 2/17/15

**Staff:** Megan Mulvihill (786-7304).

**Background:**

Textbooks.

According to the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the price of textbooks rose 82 percent between 2002 and 2013. The College Board estimates that students spend around \$1,200 a year on books and supplies for courses. A survey conducted by the United State Public Interest Research Group found that 65 percent of students had decided against buying a textbook because of its cost, and 48 percent said the cost of textbooks impacted how many and which class they took.

The increased costs of textbooks can be attributed, in part, to revisions and bundling. Textbooks are generally revised every three to four years by publishers to reflect changes in material or teaching methods. Students often object to revisions because it increases the costs of textbooks and significantly reduces a textbook's resale value. In addition, many textbooks are bundled with supplemental materials such as CD-ROMs or online access codes. Bundled textbooks are often more expensive because of the additional materials and once opened, cannot be returned to the bookstore if a student withdraws or drops a class. However, the availability of digital textbook rentals have introduced cheaper methods for obtaining textbooks, and many educational materials are available for free online.

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### Open Course Materials.

Open course materials are a variety of free, online publications, podcasts, and videos used for educational purposes usually found on a website in conjunction with an organization or university. Some open course materials include full courses and certifications. An example of an open course material database is the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Open Courseware which has over 2,200 courses available.

### Higher Education Opportunity Act.

The federal government passed the Higher Education Opportunity Act in 2008 which required increased transparency regarding the costs of textbooks. Institutions of higher education receiving federal assistance are to post textbook costs and information online, such as the International Student Book Number (ISBN) and a description of any changes in a revised edition. The GAO found that 81 percent of schools provided textbook information online. Washington passed a similar law in 2006.

### Washington's Course Material Price and Information Disclosure Law.

The institutions of higher education are required to have rules to ensure their affiliated bookstores:

- provide students with the option of purchasing materials that are unbundled when possible;
- disclose to faculty and staff the costs to students;
- disclose publicly how new editions vary from previous editions;
- actively promote and publicize buy-back programs;
- disclose retail costs for course materials on a per course basis to faculty, staff, and the public; and
- disclose information to students regarding the titles, authors, editions, prices, and ISBN at least four weeks before the start of class for required course materials.

Faculty and staff are also supposed to consider the least costly practices in assigning course material, such as using the cheapest edition available, using free online web and library sources, or using free, open course textbooks when available.

### **Summary of Bill:**

An institution of higher education may not assign a textbook to a student that costs more than \$100 unless:

- there is no available, comparable alternative that costs less than \$100; or
- there is no available substitute through open course materials.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on 02/10/15.

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