
Higher Education Committee

HB 2619

Brief Description: Providing postsecondary education to enhance education opportunities and public safety.

Sponsors: Representatives Haler, Pettigrew, Klippert, Reykdal, Zeiger, Frame and Pollet; by request of State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Permits the Department of Corrections (DOC) to implement postsecondary education degree programs (postsecondary education) at state correctional institutions within existing resources.
- Requires the DOC to determine priority criteria for selecting inmates to participate in postsecondary education.
- Requires inmates not meeting the DOC's priority criteria for postsecondary education to pay for program costs themselves if they elect to participate.
- Prohibits inmates sentenced to life without the possibility of release from participating in postsecondary education offered by the DOC or its contracted providers.

Hearing Date: 2/2/16

Staff: Megan Mulvihill (786-7304).

Background:

The Department of Corrections (DOC) is required to offer certain education and work programs to inmates based on funding available and the following goals:

- achievement of basic skills through obtaining high school diplomas or the equivalent;
- achievement of vocational skills necessary for work programs and to qualify for work upon release;

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- additional work and education programs necessary to comply with an offender's individual reentry plan, except for postsecondary education degree programs (postsecondary education); and
- other appropriate vocational, work, or educational programs that are not necessary for compliance with an offender's individual reentry plan, except for postsecondary education.

The DOC is allowed to implement postsecondary education at state correctional institutions if funding is appropriated for the purpose, and inmates must pay to participate.

The DOC contracts with the community and technical colleges to offer basic education for adults (BEA) and job training. There are 12 state correctional institutions and each offers BEA programs, job-search courses, and anger management courses. In addition, workforce programs are available, but vary by correctional institution. The workforce programs include subjects such as horticulture, carpentry, mechanics, maintenance, and baking. According to the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, in 2013-14 there were just over 9,500 incarcerated offenders participating in programs offered by the community and technical colleges. These offenders earned:

- 1,085 GED certificates;
- 1,812 vocational certificates; and
- 47 associate degrees (No state funding was used).

Summary of Bill:

The Department of Corrections (DOC) is allowed to implement postsecondary education at state correctional institutions. The DOC must determine priority criteria for selecting inmates to participate in state-funded postsecondary education, in which the DOC may consider the following:

- priority should be given to inmates within five years or less of release;
- the inmate does not already possess a postsecondary education degree; and
- the inmate's individual reentry plan includes participation in postsecondary education that is: (1) offered at the inmate's state correctional institution; and (2) is approved by the DOC as eligible and effective postsecondary education.

Inmates who do not meet the priority criteria for state-funded postsecondary education must pay for costs of the program themselves, if he or she elects to participate. An inmate sentenced to life without the possibility of release is not allowed to participate in postsecondary education offered by the DOC or its contracted providers.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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