

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## HB 2619

---

---

As of February 25, 2016

**Title:** An act relating to providing postsecondary education to enhance education opportunities and public safety.

**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 History:** Passed House: 2/16/16, 84-13.

**Committee Activity:** Law & Justice: 2/24/16.

---

### SENATE COMMITTEE ON LAW & JUSTICE

**Staff:** Lindsay Erickson (786-7465)

**Background:** Under current law, the Department of Corrections (DOC) is required, to the extent possible and considering all available funds, to prioritize its resources to meet educational goals for inmates in the following order: (1) achievement of basic academic skills through obtaining a high school diploma or its equivalent certificate; (2) achievement of vocational skills necessary for purposes of work programs and for an inmate to qualify for work upon release; (3) additional work and education programs necessary for compliance with an offender's individual re-entry plan; and (4) any other appropriate vocational, work, or education programs that are not necessary for compliance with an offender's individual re-entry plan.

The 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.

The DOC contracts with community colleges to provide basic education and job training at each of the state's 12 adult prisons. According to the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, the average Washington offender scores at an eighth-grade level or lower in basic literacy skills such as reading and math. 60 percent are unemployed, and 75 percent lack job skills and vocational training.

---

*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.*

In 2014–15, there were 9194 offenders who participated in community college programs in Washington. These students earned:

- 240 GED certificates;
- 2043 vocational certificates; and
- 36 associate degrees (no state funding was used).

A 2015 update by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy found that for every dollar invested in correctional education programs, \$18.40 is saved from fewer crimes and incarcerations. 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 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) 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 the inmate 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.

**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: Those in prison tend to lose hope, so if they can get out of prison and look forward to getting a job, the educational process can give them that hope. This bill would provide a second chance for inmates and will allow them to contribute positively to society upon release. This bill is fiscally responsible, and these are good dollars spent. According the WA State Institute for Public Policy, for every dollar spent on educational programs in prison, \$18.40 is saved in the future cost of crime and incarceration. That is a great return on investment. People who are in prison and can be educated will be less likely to recidivate. This bill is an improvement from last year's bill; there are new provisions that provide for participation of offenders who are within five years of release and the bill also specifies that offenders in prison for life without the possibility of release are not eligible. The provisions of this bill are a logical extension of educational services already provided. There are other states with similar programs: California recently started a program in which the community colleges are offering programs in prisons, and

Minnesota and Indian also have existing programs. Most programs, however, are privately funded, which is the case of the program in New York.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Representative Haler, Prime Sponsor; Dawud H. Al-Malik, citizen; Abner Pagunuran, WA Student Assoc., Bellevue College, WA Community Technical College Assoc.; Jeff Boahlac, Evergreen State College; Luke Robins, Peninsula College; Stuart Halsan, Centralia College; Brian Walsh, WA State Board for Community & Technical Colleges; Eddie Parnel, student; Zachary Kinneman, citizen.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** Sam Merrill, Friends Committee on WA Public Policy.