

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6512

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Higher Education, February 4, 2016

Title: An act relating to requiring that a percentage of state need grant recipients be pursuing degrees in STEM subjects.

Brief Description: Requiring that a certain percentage of state need grant recipients be pursuing degrees in STEM subjects.

Sponsors: Senators Baumgartner and Conway.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education: 2/02/16, 2/04/16 [DPS, w/oRec].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6512 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Bailey, Chair; Baumgartner, Vice Chair; Frockt, Ranking Member; Becker and Miloscia.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senators Carlyle and Liias.

Staff: Clint McCarthy (786-7319)

Background: The State Need Grant (SNG) program helps the state's lowest-income undergraduate students pursue degrees, hone skills, or retrain for new careers. Students can use the grants at eligible institutions in Washington. \$303 million in SNG funding enabled over 70,100 low-income resident students to pursue a degree or credential in 2013-14. According to the 2014 State Need Grant Report published by the Washington Student Achievement Council, the program was unable to serve more than 33,500 eligible students due to insufficient funds. SNG coordinates with other aid: 95 percent of students receive a Pell Grant, 40 percent receive institutional or scholarship aid, and 50 percent borrow student loans. Currently, 68 higher education institutions participate in SNG.

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.

College and university degree programs in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) are considered STEM degrees. Under existing statute, there is no requirement that requires any percentage of students receiving SNG to pursue a STEM degree.

Summary of Bill (Recommended Substitute): A work group is created to study the relationship between state need grants and the pursuit of degrees in STEM fields. The work group may invite, at its discretion, representatives from other public and private Washington institutions of higher education and agencies to provide advice and expertise. The work group shall report to the legislature and the institutions of higher education on its findings and recommendations by December 31, 2016. The section expires August 1, 2017.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE (Recommended Substitute): The requirement to have 25 percent of students receiving state need grant aid pursue STEM degrees is removed, as is the reporting requirement. A work group is established to study the relationship between state need grants and STEM fields. A report from the workgroup is due December 31, 2016.

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: We need to get more students into higher valued degrees. STEM degrees lead to high paying jobs.

CON: This bill would put a moratorium on participating education coursework that is not STEM related.

OTHER: This might add to the underserved by putting a target percentage into statute. We want students to be able to choose what they want to do, rather than be forced into a STEM program. State Need Grant is in statute to assist financially needy students, and does not focus on the degree that they are pursuing.

Persons Testifying on Original Bill: PRO: Senator Baumgartner, prime sponsor.

CON: Josh MacKintosh, Student at UW Seattle.

OTHER: Scott Copeland, State Board for Community & Technical Colleges; Becca Kenna-Schenk, Western Washington University; Juliette Schindler Kelly, College Success Foundation.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying on Original Bill: No one.