

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 1129

As Passed House:
March 1, 2017

Title: An act relating to providing associate degree education to enhance education opportunities and public safety.

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

Sponsors: House Committee on Higher Education (originally sponsored by Representatives Haler and Pollet; by request of State Board for Community and Technical Colleges).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 1/17/17, 1/24/17 [DPS];

Appropriations: 2/15/17, 2/24/17 [DPS(HE)].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/1/17, 77-21.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Allows the Department of Corrections (DOC) to implement associate degree programs at state correctional institutions, without specific funds being appropriated for that purpose.
- Permits the DOC to select inmates to participate in a state-funded associate degree program based on priority criteria determined by the DOC.
- Permits the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges to authorize any Board of Trustees of a state community or technical college to promote and conduct associate degree education and training to incarcerated adults through partnerships between the colleges and the DOC.
- Prohibits an inmate sentenced to life without the possibility of release, sentenced to death, or subject to deportation under federal law from receiving an associate degree in a program offered by the DOC.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

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.

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Hansen, Chair; Pollet, Vice Chair; Holy, Ranking Minority Member; Van Werven, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Haler, Orwall, Sells and Stambaugh.

Staff: Megan Mulvihill (786-7304).

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The substitute bill by Committee on Higher Education be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 30 members: Representatives Ormsby, Chair; Robinson, Vice Chair; Chandler, Ranking Minority Member; MacEwen, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Stokesbary, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Caldier, Cody, Condotta, Fitzgibbon, Haler, Hansen, Harris, Hudgins, Jinkins, Kagi, Lytton, Manweller, Nealey, Pettigrew, Pollet, Sawyer, Senn, Springer, Stanford, Sullivan, Tharinger, Vick, Volz and Wilcox.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Buys, Schmick and Taylor.

Staff: Lily Sobolik (786-7157).

Background:

The Department of Corrections (DOC) is required to offer certain education and work programs to inmates based on available funding 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;
- additional work and education programs necessary to comply with an offender's individual reentry plan, except for postsecondary education; and
- other appropriate vocational, work, or educational programs 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 that purpose, and inmates must pay to participate. However, in the 2015-17 fiscal biennium, the DOC was permitted to implement postsecondary education degree programs within existing resources and was allowed to select inmates to participate in state-funded postsecondary education based on priority criteria determined by the DOC.

The DOC contracts with the community and technical colleges to offer basic education for adults and job training at each of the state's 12 correctional institutions. Workforce programs are also available and include subjects such as horticulture, carpentry, mechanics, maintenance, and baking. According to the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, for the 2015-16 academic year, incarcerated adults participating in programs offered by the community and technical colleges earned:

- eight high school diplomas;

- 544 GED certificates;
- 1,709 vocational certificates; and
- 47 associate degrees.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The DOC is permitted to implement associate degree programs at state correctional institutions without specific funds being appropriated for that purpose. The DOC may consider any associate degree program from an accredited community or technical college, college, or university. The DOC may select an inmate to participate in a state-funded associate degree program based on priority criteria determined by the DOC. The DOC may consider the following:

- priority 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 an associate degree program that is: (1) offered at the inmate's state correctional institution; (2) approved by the DOC as an eligible and effective postsecondary education; and (3) is limited to an associate degree.

Inmates who do not meet the priority criteria for state-funded associate degree programs must pay for the program themselves, if he or she elects to participate. Inmates sentenced to life without the possibility of release, sentenced to death, or subject to deportation under federal law are not allowed to participate in a state-funded associate degree program.

The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges may authorize any Board of Trustees at a state community or technical college to promote and conduct associate degree education and training to incarcerated adults through new or expanded partnerships between the colleges and the DOC.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Higher Education):

(In support) This bill helps offenders without additional costs to the state. There are over 7,000 incarcerated individuals who are scheduled to return to their communities and families in Washington. Findings indicated that a greater level of education leads to greater levels of employment and less recidivism. This change provides a complete pathway of education to employment for those students and impacts the individual and the community. The number one concern upon release is whether an offender can find a job, but also a job with a living wage. The difference in earnings between a high school diploma and an associate degree is \$7,000, and closer to \$18,000 for high-demand fields like science and technology. A cost benefit analysis showed that for every dollar invested provides \$18 in return. An associate degree provides better opportunity and a second chance to be productive citizens. There is

some concern over barring people from education who are sentenced to life, but this change is supported because school doors close prison doors.

(Opposed) None.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Appropriations):

(In support) Education has life-changing impacts on inmates; it helps them become taxpaying, law-abiding citizens with employable skills. The bill passed out of the House of Representatives Higher Education Committee with unanimous support, and the companion bill passed the Senate. Education also reduces recidivism. Data from the Department of Justice shows that of inmates who participate in educational programs, 95 percent are more likely to return to work and are less likely to commit a crime. The Department of Corrections has an excellent partnership with the State Board of Community and Technical Colleges and generous support from nonprofits and individuals. There would not be increased costs with this bill, and educational programs would be rebalanced. This bill would also help meet the Result Washington goal of increasing the number of released offenders who are working.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying (Higher Education): Representative Haler, prime sponsor; Brian Walsh, State Board of Community and Technical Colleges; Jeff Landon, Department of Corrections; Jean Hernandez, Edmonds Community College; Dirk Van Velzen, Prison Scholar Trust; Elijah Moloney, Gateways for Incarcerated Youth; and Jessica Bagdasarov, Washington Student Association

Persons Testifying (Appropriations): Representative Haler, prime sponsor; Mike Paris, Department of Corrections; Brian Walsh, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; and Jessi Bagdasarov, Washington Student Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Higher Education): None.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Appropriations): None.