
Higher Education Committee

SSB 5069

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

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Law & Justice (originally sponsored by Senators Walsh, Frockt, O'Ban, Zeiger, Chase, Hasegawa, Conway and Palumbo; by request of State Board for Community and Technical Colleges).

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 workforce degree programs 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 a postsecondary degree in a program offered by the DOC.

Hearing Date:

Staff: Megan Mulvihill (786-7304).

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;

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- 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 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 that is part of an associate workforce degree program designed to prepare inmates to enter the workforce. 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 workforce degree.

Inmates who do not meet the priority criteria for state-funded postsecondary 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.