

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5069

As Reported by House Committee On: Higher Education

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: 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 History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 3/14/17, 3/22/17 [DP].

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 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.

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: Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Hansen, Chair; Pollet, Vice Chair; Holy, Ranking Minority Member; Van Werven, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Haler, Orwall, Sells, Stambaugh and Tarleton.

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;
- 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 General Education Degree 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.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Prison education is very important. There are three immediate benefits from prison education: (1) improves public safety, (2) increases tax revenue, and (3) makes prison climate better for correctional officers and inmates. If the state implemented full-blown prison education, the state would stop building prisons. About 8,000 inmates reenter into civilian life each year. On average, each inmate has been in prison for about 23 months, and this is not a lot of time for them to be engaged in education. Education needs to be integrated and done rapidly, which the state's community and technical colleges do well. Good prison education programs drop recidivism to about 7 or 8 percent. The state investments need to be compatible with the nonprofit organizations that work in the prisons, and even with the focus on workforce degrees the existing programs will be able to continue.

At release, an inmate gets a bus ticket back to the county they were charged in and \$40. This does not help anyone succeed. A workforce degree will give people a set of skills to get work. The state has labor shortages, and this is a potential untapped source to fill those needs.

There is a minor difference in this bill compared to the companion bill, which states the associate degrees must be associate workforce degrees. This is to ensure that the degrees inmates are receiving are functional and applicable. There are some fantastic programs that help inmates achieve a livable wage, and if the state wants to reduce recidivism, inmates

need to be equipped with some resources, such as education and credentials needed to secure long-term employment.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Walsh, prime sponsor; Larry Seaquist; Nova Gattman, Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board; Zachary Kinneman; Mike Paris, Department of Corrections; and Brian Walsh, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.