

---

## College & Workforce Development Committee

---

### SSB 5166

**Brief Description:** Providing religious accommodations for postsecondary students.

**Sponsors:** Senate Committee on Higher Education & Workforce Development (originally sponsored by Senators Hasegawa, Carlyle, Frockt, Palumbo and Nguyen).

#### Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Amends the requirement for institutions of higher education to accommodate a student's absences based on reasons of faith or conscience, to include additional postsecondary educational institutions and to allow for more than two days of absences.
- Requires postsecondary institutions to provide certain accommodations to students whose sincerely held religious beliefs impact the student's ability to perform on an exam or meet requirements to successfully complete a program.

**Hearing Date:** 3/20/19

**Staff:** Trudes Tango (786-7384).

#### **Background:**

Institutions of higher education are required to have policies to accommodate a student's absences for up to two days per academic year, to allow the student to take holidays for reasons of faith or conscience or for organized religious activities, so that student's grades are not adversely impacted by the absences.

Institutions of higher education are the public four-year institutions and the community and technical colleges.

---

*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.*

## **Summary of Bill:**

The requirement to develop policies to accommodate a student's absences for reasons of faith or conscience or for organized religious activities is expanded to: (1) include degree-granting institutions, private vocational schools, cosmetology schools, and any entity offering academic credit for apprenticeship; and (2) allow for more than two days of absences per academic year.

In addition, a student's sincerely held religious beliefs and practices must be reasonably accommodated regarding all examinations and other requirements to successfully complete a program. Instructors may schedule alternative times without prejudicial effect before or after regularly scheduled examinations or other requirements to successfully complete a program. Instructors must: (1) accept at face value the sincerity of the student's religious beliefs; and (2) keep requests for accommodation confidential unless disclosure is required to facilitate the accommodation with campus administrators.

The postsecondary educational institution must make alternative accommodations for a student when:

- the student's sincerely held religious belief or practice materially impacts the student's ability to perform on an examination or meet a requirement to successfully complete a program; and
- the student provided written notice within the first two weeks of the beginning of the program of the specific dates the student requests alternative accommodations from the examination or requirement.

Postsecondary educational institutions must:

- distribute a copy of its policy to faculty, students, and administrators, and ensure the policy is published on its web site;
- include its policy in any future publication of any publicly available handbook or other document regularly provided to faculty, students, and staff;
- provide instructors, faculty, administrators, and other relevant staff a nonexhaustive list of major religious holy days or festivals for the following two academic years to facilitate planning; and
- provide a process for students to notify the Title IX coordinator or the coordinator's designee, or a designated staff member if there is no Title IX coordinator, of any grievances with regard to implementing the accommodation requirements and to seek redress.

Instructors must include in each course syllabus a statement regarding the institution's policy, including a description of the general procedure to request accommodations, and informing students of the point of contact for the student to seek accommodations or more information. The institution may not impose fees on students as a result of seeking accommodations.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

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