

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5498

As Amended by House, March 4, 2022

Title: An act relating to posthumous high school diplomas.

Brief Description: Awarding diplomas posthumously.

Sponsors: Senators Wilson, C., Billig, Das, Lovelett, Lovick, Nobles, Wagoner and Wellman.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 1/14/22, 1/21/22 [DP].

Floor Activity: Passed Senate: 2/2/22, 47-0.

Passed House: 3/4/22, 97-1.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires school districts, if requested by the student's parent, guardian, or custodian, to issue a high school diploma to a deceased student if the student was academically eligible to graduate or had completed at least 75 percent of the number of credits required to graduate, and died after completing the 11th grade school year.
- Establishes that districts are not required to award a diploma to a deceased student at the same ceremony or event as other graduating students.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Wellman, Chair; Nobles, Vice Chair, K-12; Wilson, C., Vice Chair, Early Learning; Hawkins, Ranking Member; Dozier, Hunt, McCune, Mullet and Pedersen.

Staff: Benjamin Omdal (786-7442)

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Background: High School Diplomas. To graduate from high school, a student must satisfy requirements set by the State Board of Education (SBE), satisfy credit requirements, complete a High School and Beyond Plan, and meet the requirements of a graduation pathway. In addition, a student must meet any additional requirements set by the student's public high school or school district.

Upon students' satisfactory completion of all local and state graduation requirements, school districts must issue diplomas to students signifying graduation from high school.

In 2002, the Legislature gave districts the ability to issue a high school diploma to certain groups of veterans of the armed forces, including to an individual on behalf of a deceased veteran.

Summary of Bill: At the request of the parent, guardian, or custodian, a school district must issue a high school diploma to a deceased student if the student:

- was enrolled in a public school in the district at the time of death;
- was academically eligible to graduate or had completed at least 75 percent of the total number of credits required for graduation as established by the State Board of Education; and
- died after completing the 11th grade school year.

The high school diploma may not be issued before the graduation date of the class in which the student was enrolled. Districts are not required to award the diploma at the same ceremony or event as other students.

The act may be known and cited as Evitan's Law.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Parents have received varying responses from districts when requesting a diploma. Parents have felt that at times the awarding of a diploma has been conditional on the means of death. For some families, their student would have been the first student to have graduated high school. Some students pass away with only a few credits left for graduation, yet are not awarded diplomas by their local district, even when those students have an Individualized Education Program.

OTHER: Many districts already issue these types of diplomas. Some school leaders believe that the decision should remain a local one.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Claire Wilson, Prime Sponsor; Clysta Cole.

OTHER: Roz Thompson, Association of Washington School Principals.

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

EFFECT OF HOUSE AMENDMENT(S):

- Authorizes, rather than requires, school districts to issue posthumous high school diplomas for qualifying students.
- Removes provisions requiring the student to have completed at least 75 percent of the total number of credits required and that the student have completed grade 11 or the equivalent.
- Requires the student to have been deemed on-track for graduation.
- Requires posthumous diplomas to be inscribed with "honoris causa."
- Adds intent language.