

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1399

As Reported by House Committee On:
Postsecondary Education & Workforce

Title: An act relating to establishing a Native American scholarship program.

Brief Description: Establishing a Native American scholarship program.

Sponsors: Representatives Lekanoff, Slatter, Taylor, Simmons, Berry, Ramel, Fosse, Macri, Pollet, Reed, Doglio, Davis and Santos.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Postsecondary Education & Workforce: 1/27/23, 2/3/23 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Establishes the Native American Scholarship Program.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION & WORKFORCE

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Slatter, Chair; Entenman, Vice Chair; Reed, Vice Chair; Hansen, Leavitt, Paul, Pollet and Timmons.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Chandler.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Ybarra, Ranking Minority Member; Waters, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Klicker and Schmidt.

Staff: Elizabeth Allison (786-7129).

Background:

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.

Office of Student Financial Assistance.

The Office of Student Financial Assistance (Office) is created within the Washington Student Achievement Council. The Office administers state and federal financial aid and other education services programs.

Financial Aid Applications.

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is a federal financial aid application used to determine a student's eligibility for federal financial aid.

The Washington Application for State Financial Aid (WASFA) is used by students who do not fill out a FAFSA, which includes undocumented students or those who do not qualify due to immigration status. The WASFA is used to qualify such students for state financial aid.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the Native American Scholarship Program (Program) is established and must be administered by the Office of Student Financial Assistance (Office). The Office must publicize the Program, award scholarships to eligible students, and adopt any necessary rules and guidelines for the Program in consultation with the tribes, institutions of higher education, and registered apprenticeship programs.

To be eligible, a student must:

- be a member of a federally recognized Indian tribe located within the United States;
- file a financial aid application; and
- enroll in an undergraduate degree program at an institution of higher education or registered apprenticeship program.

The Office must determine scholarship awarding priorities and award amounts for eligible students in consultation with the tribes, institutions of higher education, and registered apprenticeship programs. Funding must be prioritized at a level equivalent to in-state tuition and fee rates for eligible students. Eligible students who have in-state tuition and fees covered by other gift aid may receive an award to help cover the cost of attendance expenses, such as room and board, books and supplies, transportation, and other living expenses.

For registered apprenticeship programs, the Office must prioritize funding to cover any tuition costs for related supplemental instruction. Additional funding may be used to provide a scholarship to cover required supplies, tools, materials, work clothing, and living expenses.

Students may receive the scholarship for a maximum of 150 percent of their time to degree

or six years, whichever occurs first. Eligible students must maintain satisfactory academic progress to remain eligible.

The Native American Scholarship Account (Account) is created in the custody of the state treasurer. All receipts for the Program must be deposited in the Account, and expenditures from the Account must be used only for the Program. Only the Director of the Office may authorize expenditures from the Account.

Beginning with the 2023-24 academic year, institutions of higher education must add a place for students to indicate that they are a member of a federally recognized Indian tribe on their applications.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill extends eligibility for the Program from 125 percent of time to degree, or five years, to 150 percent of time to degree, or six years.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Preliminary fiscal note available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The bill will support institutions in providing outreach and technical assistance for students interested in workforce development. Native American student attendance is lower than institutions would like, and this bill could give them an opportunity to attend. This is especially important considering that the land in Ellensburg and Yakima where Central Washington University (CWU) campuses are located once belonged to the Yakama Nation. Sixty percent of Native American students at CWU have experienced homelessness and 25 percent have experienced food insecurity. The structure of the bill allows students who are proactive in securing other sources of financial aid to use this scholarship for other attendance needs. In addition to admitting more Native American students, there need to be ways to embed indigenous ways into curriculum and pedagogy to make Native American students feel supported.

Funding for college and related educational expenses is a major barrier for tribal citizens enrolled in postsecondary education. Not all Native American students come from tribes that have resources to pay for all students to go to college. Native American folks are among the poorest people, are least likely to finish high school, are most likely to have problems in finishing college, and are most likely to be called upon by tribes to take

leadership roles to support tribal members. In many cases tribes struggle to hire their own tribal members because those members do not have the education needed to take jobs in tribal government and urban Indian areas. This bill is an important first step. There is hope that in the future there can be additional resources to support other academic areas and for graduate programs.

There is a common goal of increasing access for Native American students. Educational institutions have an obligation to Native American students and communities due to past experiences with Native American boarding schools. Such a legacy makes a lasting impact. Native American students are extremely resilient and they need a clear message that they belong in higher education. This bill will send that message. Students fill out a FAFSA and are still left with a high amount of unmet need. This large gap is sometimes insurmountable, and this bill will help address that. There is a reciprocal giving in the Nez Perce culture. When they are given to they give back much more.

This bill will provide a stable funding source to allow students to focus on studies. Its passage will increase support for Native American students, which could increase the number of Native educators who will support the work of tribes, as well as increase the number of legislators removing barriers that start at the early learning levels and continue through higher education levels.

Washington has established a postsecondary attainment goal of 70 percent of its population. Native American students are woefully below this attainment goal and will not be able to fill future job openings. There is also a moral argument for passing this bill—after two centuries of oppression, providing increased opportunities for Native American students is simply the right thing to do. The bill aims to address a population that the state has failed. Students that identify as Native American often face more needs than other folks. The intent language outlines the historic systemic racism at the hands of white people. This has led to whitewashing and destruction of Native cultures.

The bill will help federally recognized tribal students pay for their degrees. Passing the bill would be a beneficial investment in Native students, their families, and communities. The education system has traumatically failed Native American students and deprived their communities of meaningful education. Some Native American students do not view attending college as achievable so they do not apply due to the financial burden. They end up prioritizing work over studies and have to leave school.

Education is considered economic development, and this is what makes it important. Giving back is a major part of Native American culture. The Cowlitz Tribe will employ many people when its new hotel opens. Members of the Cowlitz Tribe love education and want to be involved. The students will succeed if given the chance. Money for school is an issue. Travel and living expenses are great, especially if a student goes back to school after starting a family. The bill is a responsive way to repay Native American students for boarding schools. The state needs to recognize the First People of Washington. This is an

enormous opportunity for Washington to stand up and say that it will invest in the population and race of people who have called Washington home for generations. This is not a budget issue because Native American folks are such a tiny portion of the population. They used to be the only people here and are now only one percent.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Debra Lekanoff, prime sponsor; Sherri Berdine, University of Washington; Rebecca Purser, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; Stephen Bollens, Washington State University and Council of Faculty; Kara Briggs, The Evergreen State College; Zoe Higheagle Strong, Washington State University; Lynn Palmanteer-Holder, Tribal Government Affairs Office for Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges; Jim Wohlpart, Central Washington University; Alex Davidson, The Associated Students of the University of Washington; Naira Gonzales, Associated Students of Western Washington University; Laraya Johnson and Frank Miedema, Western Washington University; and Mike Iyall, Cowlitz Indian Tribe.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: Katlyn Prophet; Collin Bannister and Savannah Eakin, Associated Students of Washington State University; Joel Anderson, University of Washington Graduate and Professional Student Senate; Savannah Eakin, Washington State University; John Worthington; Corey Hodge, Kansas Arnoux, and Angelique Williams, Heritage University; and Terri Standish-Kuon, Independent Colleges of Washington.