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## Postsecondary Education & Workforce Committee

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### HB 1559

**Brief Description:** Establishing the student basic needs at public postsecondary institutions act.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Entenman, Fitzgibbon, Stonier, Paul, Riccelli, Bergquist, Pollet and Leavitt.

#### Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes the Benefits Navigator Grant Program to fund, in part, Benefits Resource Hubs at institutions of higher education, university campuses, and tribal institutions.
- Creates Student Basic Needs Task Forces and a Student Basic Needs Work Group.
- Enacts the Free and Reduced-Price Meals Pilot Program.

**Hearing Date:** 1/31/23

**Staff:** Saranda Ross (786-7068).

#### Background:

Several community and technical colleges provide a range of on-campus resource services. Lower Columbia College's One-Stop Center offers students general information and connection with resources. Edmonds College has a Center for Student Cultural Diversity and Inclusion, which provides emergency resources. And South Puget Sound Community College's Personal Support Center offers assistance with food, connection to housing and basic needs support, and on-campus childcare and parent support classes.

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United Way of King County provides Benefits Hubs to eight community and technical colleges in King County: Bellevue College, Cascadia College, Highline College, Green River College, North Seattle College, Renton Technical College, Seattle Central College, Shoreline Community College, South Seattle College; and one baccalaureate institution, UW Bothell. The Benefits Hubs offer a variety of services such as financial coaching, basic needs access, food security, and emergency grant help.

In addition to UW Bothell, there are several baccalaureates that offer similar campus benefits resource hubs or services. The Evergreen State College has a Basic Needs Advocacy and Resource Center that provides navigation support for public benefits, housing, and basic needs. The University of Washington Tacoma has an Office of Student Advocacy and Support offering extensive assessment, case management, and resource connections. Central Washington University, Eastern Washington University, Western Washington University, and Washington State University do not offer a centralized, physical resource hub, but do provide case management and access to resources and referrals, such as food pantries.

### **Summary of Bill:**

#### Student Basic Needs Task Forces.

Institutions of higher education, university campuses, and tribal institutions of higher education (institutions) must each establish a Student Basic Needs Task Force (Task Force) to develop a Hunger-Free Campus Strategic Plan (plan).

In creating the plan, each Task Force must:

- a. analyze gaps in student basic needs;
- b. design a Benefits Resource Hub to assist students with accessing public benefits, emergency financial assistance, and other community resources;
- c. hire at least one full-time Benefits Navigator to staff the Benefits Resource Hub;
- d. provide access to a campus food pantry;
- e. create and update methods to identify low-income and food-insecure students;
- f. promote opportunities for benefits assistance;
- g. assess the needs and advantages of the Benefits Navigator Model; and
- h. identify opportunities to partner with community organizations to support student basic needs, access to benefits, and community resources.

Each Task Force must provide a report detailing the findings and activities from the plan to the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) and the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC).

#### Student Basic Needs Work Group.

WSAC and SBCTC must create a Student Basic Needs Work Group (Work Group) to learn from the experiences of students and local institutions of higher education. The Work Group must:

- a. develop budgetary and administrative policy in the administration of the Work Group;
- b. provide technical assistance to the Task Forces;

- c. collect and disseminate student survey data measuring student basic needs;
- d. determine how many full-time Benefits Navigators are necessary to assist each institution's student population;
- e. facilitate discussions and generate recommendations amongst stakeholders on student basic needs;
- f. assess whether institutions' funds are effectively meeting student basic needs;
- g. issue biennial recommendations to address student basic needs to the legislature; and
- h. collaborate with not-for-profit organizations with expertise in student basic needs programs or benefits navigation to provide ongoing technical assistance and training.

Benefits Navigator Grant Program.

WSAC and SBCTC must establish and administer a Benefits Navigator Grant Program (Grant Program) to provide funding for the implementation of select Task Force's Plans. In administering the Grant Program, WSAC and SBCTC must, where applicable, maximize the use of the Basic Food Employment and Training Program and federal funds.

Free and Reduced-Price Meals Pilot Program.

Chosen by WSAC and SBCTC, four community and technical colleges and two public four-year institutions of higher education must participate in a pilot program to provide free and low-cost meal plans or food vouchers to eligible low-income students.

Definitions.

Student basic needs are food, water, nutrition, shelter, clothing, physical health, mental health, childcare, or similar needs that students enrolled at an institution of higher education may face difficulty with and that hinder their ability to begin or continue their enrollment.

A Benefits Resource Hub is a single location on campus where students are directed to get assistance from a benefits navigator to understand what basic needs benefits they may be eligible for and receive assistance in applications, enrollment, and removing barriers to receive support services.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 25, 2023.

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