
Postsecondary Education & Workforce Committee

HB 2171

Brief Description: Addressing financial aid grants for incarcerated students.

Sponsors: Representatives Leavitt, Waters, Slatter, Simmons, Reed, Ramel, Doglio, Reeves and Davis.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Allows incarcerated individuals to apply for and utilize federal and state financial aid grants for use towards postsecondary education programs approved by the Department of Corrections.

Hearing Date: 1/10/24

Staff: Saranda Ross (786-7068).

Background:

The Department of Corrections (DOC) offers certain education and work programs to incarcerated individuals at state correctional institutions based on available funding and with the following goals, prioritized in the order listed:

1. the achievement of basic skills by obtaining a high school diploma or the equivalent;
2. the achievement of vocational skills necessary for work programs and to qualify for work upon release;
3. participation in additional work and education programs necessary to comply with an individual reentry plan, including special education services and postsecondary degree or certificate education programs; and
4. participation in other appropriate vocational, work, or educational programs not necessary for compliance with an individual reentry plan, including postsecondary degree or

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certificate education programs.

If programming is provided for goals 1, 2, or 3, the DOC pays the cost, including books, materials, and supplies. If programming is provided for goal 4, the incarcerated individual is required to pay all or a portion of the cost, including books, fees, and tuition based on a DOC formula that correlates to the incarcerated individual's average monthly income or available savings, and a prorated portion or percent of the per-credit fee. A third party may pay the DOC directly for all or a portion of the programming costs aligned with the fourth goal.

Summary of Bill:

Incarcerated individuals may apply for and utilize federal and state financial aid grants for use towards postsecondary education programs eligible for such grants in the pursuit of the following goals:

1. the achievement of basic skills by obtaining a high school diploma or the equivalent;
2. the achievement of vocational skills necessary for work programs and to qualify for work upon release;
3. participation in additional work and education programs necessary to comply with an individual reentry plan, including special education services and postsecondary degree or certificate education programs; and
4. participation in other appropriate vocational, work, or educational programs not necessary for compliance with an individual reentry plan, including postsecondary degree or certificate education programs.

The DOC may not require an incarcerated individual to apply for or utilize financial aid grants as a condition to participation in such programming.

The DOC must pay the cost of programming for goals 1, 2, or 3, including books, materials, and supplies, not otherwise covered by third-party funding if:

- the cost of attendance exceeds the grant award;
- the incarcerated individual is not eligible for financial aid;
- the incarcerated individual chooses not to apply for or utilize financial aid; or
- financial aid is not available.

Upon approval from the DOC, incarcerated individuals may receive donated education materials funded by grants and donations and supplied by education providers for goal 4. The DOC must adjust its formula for determining how much an incarcerated individual must pay for programming under goal 4 to deduct amounts from available financial aid or third-party funding. The adjusted postaward formula offsets and funds paid by the DOC for educational programming under goal 4 shall not result in the reduction of gift aid. Gift aid is financial aid received from the federal Pell grant, the Washington college grant, the college bound scholarship program, the opportunity grant program, or any other state grant, scholarship, or worker retraining program that provides funds for educational purposes with no obligation of repayment.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 5, 2024.

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