

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2267

As Reported by House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to providing public school students with opportunities for cultural expression at commencement ceremonies.

Brief Description: Providing public school students with opportunities for cultural expression at commencement ceremonies.

Sponsors: Representatives McEntire, Morgan, Ybarra, Stonier, Harris, Ormsby, Chapman, Senn, Davis, Thai, Santos, Callan, Cortes, Pollet and Simmons.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 1/16/24, 1/25/24 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires school districts, charter schools, and state-tribal education compact schools to permit students to wear one item or object of cultural significance with or attached to their gown at high school commencements and other official graduation ceremonies and events.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 15 members: Representatives Santos, Chair; Shavers, Vice Chair; Rude, Ranking Minority Member; McEntire, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Couture, Eslick, Harris, McClintock, Nance, Ortiz-Self, Pollet, Steele, Stonier and Timmons.

Staff: Ethan Moreno (786-7386).

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:

With limited exceptions, determinations about attire and accessories that may be worn by students at graduation ceremonies are determined by school districts, charter schools, and state-tribal education compact schools.

In accordance with the local authority, the Washington State School Directors' Association, the state agency that provides advice and assistance to school boards and adopts model policies and procedures that districts may adopt, has developed a model policy and procedure addressing student graduation attire. Among other provisions, the model policy specifies that students who participate in graduation ceremonies must participate in the ceremony rehearsal, that students must use good taste in their choice of accessories for their attire, and that failure to comply with requirements may result in the forfeiture of a student's privilege to participate in the ceremony.

At the state level, legislation enacted in 2020 provided that school districts and public schools may not prohibit students who are members of a federally recognized tribe from wearing traditional tribal regalia or objects of Native American cultural significance along with or attached to a gown at graduation ceremonies or related school events.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

School districts, charter schools, and state-tribal education compact schools must permit students to wear one item or object of cultural significance with or attached to their gown at high school commencements and other official graduation ceremonies and events. The items or objects must be befitting of the ceremony or event and adhere to applicable decorum requirements of the school district, charter school, or state-tribal education compact school.

Compliance with provisions for the wearing of an item or object of cultural significance by students does not limit the discretion and authority of school districts, charter schools, and state-tribal education compact schools to prohibit an item that is likely to cause a substantial disruption of, or material interference with, a high school commencement or other official graduation ceremony or event.

Provisions related to the wearing of traditional tribal regalia or objects of Native American cultural significance by students who are members of a federally recognized tribe are not modified or otherwise effected.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill changes the original bill by specifying that the requirement of school districts, charter schools, and state-tribal education compact schools to permit students to

wear one item or object of cultural significance at high school commencements and other official graduation ceremonies and events does not limit the discretion and authority of school districts, charter schools, and state-tribal education compact schools to prohibit an item that is likely to cause a substantial disruption of, or material interference with, a high school commencement or other official graduation ceremony or event.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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 idea for this bill came from a student who wanted to celebrate her culture by wearing an item at a graduation ceremony, but strict rules prevented her from doing so. Local control is important, and this bill offers a good balance between freedom of speech and expression and requirements for school decorum.

Students have been prohibited from wearing regalia during graduation ceremonies. Those prohibitive policies are expressions of suppressing students' cultural heritage. This bill will allow student expressions of cultural heritage to occur.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Joel McEntire, prime sponsor; and Lidia Morales.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.