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**HOUSE BILL 1572**

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**State of Washington 69th Legislature 2025 Regular Session**

**By** Representatives Pollet, Entenman, Reed, and Nance

AN ACT Relating to modifying higher education accreditation standards; amending RCW 28B.85.020 and 28B.85.040; and providing an effective date.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

**Sec.**  RCW 28B.85.020 and 2013 c 218 s 3 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The council:

(a) Shall adopt by rule, in accordance with chapter 34.05 RCW, minimum standards for degree-granting institutions concerning granting of degrees, quality of education, unfair business practices, financial stability, and other necessary measures to protect citizens of this state against substandard, fraudulent, or deceptive practices. The rules shall require that an institution operating in Washington:

(i) Be accredited;

(ii) Have applied for accreditation and such application is pending before the accrediting agency;

(iii) Have been granted a waiver by the council waiving the requirement of accreditation; or

(iv) Have been granted an exemption by the council from the requirements of this subsection (1)(a);

(b) Shall recognize accrediting agencies that maintain rigorous standards for institutional eligibility, including requirements related to institutional effectiveness, student learning, assessment, governance, academic independence, administrative and fiscal responsibility, and transparency. Such recognition:

(i) May be independent from the recognition or approval of accrediting agencies by other entities, including the United States department of education; and

(ii) May not rely solely on reciprocity agreements between states that do not hold similar minimum standards;

(c) May investigate any entity the council reasonably believes to be subject to the jurisdiction of this chapter. In connection with the investigation, the council may administer oaths and affirmations, issue subpoenas and compel attendance, take evidence, and require the production of any books, papers, correspondence, memorandums, or other records which the council deems relevant or material to the investigation. The council, including its staff and any other authorized persons, may conduct site inspections, the cost of which shall be borne by the institution, and examine records of all institutions subject to this chapter;

((~~(c)~~)) (d) May negotiate and enter into interstate reciprocity agreements with other state or multistate entities if the agreements are consistent with the purposes in this chapter as determined by the council;

((~~(d)~~)) (e) May enter into agreements with degree-granting institutions of higher education based in this state, that are otherwise exempt under the provisions of ((~~subsection (1)~~))(a) of this ((~~section~~)) subsection, for the purpose of ensuring consistent consumer protection in interstate distance delivery of higher education;

((~~(e)~~)) (f) Shall develop an interagency agreement with the workforce training and education coordinating board to regulate degree-granting private vocational schools with respect to degree and nondegree programs; and

((~~(f)~~)) (g) Shall develop and disseminate information to the public about entities that sell or award degrees without requiring appropriate academic achievement at the postsecondary level, including but not limited to, a description of the substandard and potentially fraudulent practices of these entities, and advice about how the public can recognize and avoid the entities. To the extent feasible, the information shall include links to additional resources that may assist the public in identifying specific institutions offering substandard or fraudulent degree programs.

(2) Financial disclosures provided to the council by degree-granting private vocational schools are not subject to public disclosure under chapter 42.56 RCW.

**Sec.**  RCW 28B.85.040 and 2012 c 229 s 545 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) An institution or person shall not advertise, offer, sell, or award a degree or any other type of educational credential unless the student has enrolled in and successfully completed a prescribed program of study, as outlined in the institution's publications. This prohibition shall not apply to honorary credentials clearly designated as such on the front side of the diploma or certificate and awarded by institutions offering other educational credentials in compliance with state law.

(2) No exemption or waiver granted under this chapter is permanent. The council shall periodically review exempted degree-granting institutions and degree-granting institutions granted a waiver, and continue exemptions or waivers only if an institution meets the statutory or council requirements for exemption or waiver in effect on the date of the review.

(3) Except as provided in subsection (1) of this section, this chapter shall not apply to:

(a) Any public college, university, community college, technical college, or institute operating as part of the public higher educational system of this state;

(b) Institutions that have been accredited by an accrediting association recognized by the council for the purposes of this chapter: PROVIDED, That those institutions meet minimum exemption standards adopted by the council; and PROVIDED FURTHER, That an institution, branch, extension, or facility operating within the state of Washington which is affiliated with an institution operating in another state ((~~must be a separately accredited member institution of any such accrediting association to qualify for this exemption~~)):

(i) Has continuously offered degree programs in the state for 10 years or more;

(ii) Has been continuously authorized to offer degree programs in its home state for 20 years or more;

(iii) Has been continuously accredited as a degree-granting institution for 10 years or more by an accrediting association recognized by the council and the secretary of the United States department of education, and maintains such accreditation status;

(iv) Maintains eligibility to participate in Title IV financial aid programs;

(v) Is recognized for its extensive academic research and innovation, doctoral programs, and advanced facilities and resources; and

(vi) Maintains ongoing compliance with the requirements for authorization specified in this chapter. If an institution fails to maintain compliance with such requirements, the council may:

(A) Deny an application for exemption; or

(B) Suspend or withdraw an existing exemption;

(c) Institutions of a religious character, but only as to those education programs devoted exclusively to religious or theological objectives if the programs are represented in an accurate manner in institutional catalogs and other official publications;

(d) Honorary credentials clearly designated as such on the front side of the diploma or certificate awarded by institutions offering other educational credentials in compliance with state law; or

(e) Institutions not otherwise exempt which offer only workshops or seminars and institutions offering only credit-bearing workshops or seminars lasting no longer than three calendar days.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  Section 1 of this act takes effect December 1, 2026.

**--- END ---**