

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5110

As Passed Senate, February 28, 2025

Title: An act relating to tuition waivers for tribal elders at Washington's community and technical colleges.

Brief Description: Providing tuition waivers for tribal elders at Washington's community and technical colleges.

Sponsors: Senators Kauffman, Chapman, Dhingra, Frame, Hasegawa, Lias, Lovelett, Nobles, Riccelli, Saldaña, Shewmake, Slatter, Valdez and Wellman; by request of State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education & Workforce Development: 1/16/25, 1/23/25 [DP-WM].

Ways & Means: 2/03/25, 2/13/25 [DP, w/oRec].

Floor Activity: Passed Senate: 2/28/25, 48-0.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes a waiver for all or a portion of tuition fees and services and activity fees for tribal elders.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Nobles, Chair; Hansen, Vice Chair; Warnick, Ranking Member; Boehnke and Slatter.

Staff: Kellee Gunn

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.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Robinson, Chair; Stanford, Vice Chair, Operating; Trudeau, Vice Chair, Capital; Frame, Vice Chair, Finance; Gildon, Ranking Member, Operating; Torres, Assistant Ranking Member, Operating; Dozier, Assistant Ranking Member, Capital; Boehnke, Cleveland, Conway, Dhingra, Hansen, Hasegawa, Kauffman, Muzzall, Pedersen, Riccelli, Saldaña, Wagoner, Warnick, Wellman and Wilson, C..

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senator Schoesler, Ranking Member, Capital.

Staff: Michele Alishahi

Background: Waivers. Institutions of higher education may waive tuition, student and activities fees, or both, if a student meets certain criteria. Waivers fall into three main categories:

- those required by law;
- those required by the school or the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; and
- optional waivers that the institution may choose to offer.

Some waivers are subject to a cap on the amount that may be waived.

Waiver for Those Over 60 Years of Age. Public institutions of higher education, by state law, may waive, in part or in whole, tuition, and services and activity (S&A) fees for those over 60 years old seeking credit.

Federally Recognized Indian Tribes. There are 29 federally recognized tribes throughout Washington and they are: Chehalis, Colville, Cowlitz, Hoh, Jamestown S'Klallam, Kalispel, Lower Elwha Klallam, Lummi, Makah, Muckleshoot, Nisqually, Nooksack, Port Gamble S'Klallam, Puyallup, Quileute, Quinault, Samish, Sauk-Suiattle, Shoalwater Bay, Skokomish, Snoqualmie, Spokane, Squaxin Island, Stillaguamish, Suquamish, Swinomish, Tulalip, Upper Skagit, and Yakama.

Summary of Bill: Each community and technical college may waive all or a portion of tuition fees and S&A fees for tribal elders over the age of 55 from federally recognized Indian tribes.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Higher Education & Workforce Development):

PRO: This would lower the age of tribal elders to qualify for a waiver already established at CTCs for those over 60. This bill would be a positive intergenerational bill. Tribal elders have had fewer opportunities to pursue higher education. This will make a difference in tribal communities across the state. This is culturally more inclusive, as each tribe determines who an elder is differently.

Persons Testifying (Higher Education & Workforce Development): PRO: Senator Claudia Kauffman, Prime Sponsor; Maya Esquivido, WA State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Krista Francis, Peninsula College; Cathleen MacCaul, AARP Washington State.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Higher Education & Workforce Development): No one.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Ways & Means): PRO: Tribal communities acknowledge elder status at the age of 55 and this change would be an important step toward recognizing the unique contribution and needs of Indigenous communities and educational systems. According to the National Council of Urban Indian Health, the current life expectancy for Native peoples is approximately 65 years old compared to 76 years old for the general population. By lowering the eligibility age to 55, this bill acknowledges that tribal leaders may have fewer opportunities to pursue educational activities later in life due to these challenges. Access to tuition waivers would help ensure that they have the chance to further their education.

This bill should not hit the state's general fund due to the optional nature of the waiver. Each college can decide if they want to adopt the waiver and absorb the cost.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Suzy Ames, Peninsula College; Maya Esquivido, SBCTC.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Ways & Means): No one.