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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

Read first time 01/24/25. Referred to Committee on Postsecondary Education & Workforce.

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

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

5 **Sec. 1.** RCW 28B.85.020 and 2013 c 218 s 3 are each amended to  
6 read as follows:

7 (1) The council:

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

15 (i) Be accredited;

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

35       ~~((f))~~ (g) Shall develop and disseminate information to the  
36 public about entities that sell or award degrees without requiring  
37 appropriate academic achievement at the postsecondary level,  
38 including but not limited to, a description of the substandard and  
39 potentially fraudulent practices of these entities, and advice about  
40 how the public can recognize and avoid the entities. To the extent

1 feasible, the information shall include links to additional resources  
2 that may assist the public in identifying specific institutions  
3 offering substandard or fraudulent degree programs.

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

7 **Sec. 2.** RCW 28B.85.040 and 2012 c 229 s 545 are each amended to  
8 read as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

13 (A) Deny an application for exemption; or

14 (B) Suspend or withdraw an existing exemption;

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

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

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

25 NEW SECTION. Sec. 3. Section 1 of this act takes effect  
26 December 1, 2026.

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