
Higher Education Committee

SSB 5254

Brief Description: Authorizing a grant program for industry skill panels.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Kilmer, Kastama, Fairley, Rockefeller, Kauffman, Marr, Hatfield, Weinstein, Keiser, Sheldon, McAuliffe, Eide, Kohl-Welles, Shin, Murray, Tom, Regala, Spanel and Kline).

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Directs the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (WTECB) to allocate grants to support Industry Skill Panels. The WTECB must establish standards to evaluate the products and services created by skill panels.

Hearing Date: 2/20/08

Staff: Andi Smith (786-7304).

Background:

Industry Skill Panels are regional alliances of businesses, labor, and education and training providers in key industry clusters. The Panels assess skill gaps in an industry and design and implement strategies to close those gaps. The formation of panels is overseen by the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (WTECB). They work in conjunction with Centers of Excellence organized by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges and have relied on funding from the federal Workforce Investment Act. Washington was the first state in the nation to create a system of such panels and serves as a mentor to other states. There are no Skill Panels in many key industry clusters.

The WTECB has an established competitive process used to identify organizations interested in convening Skill Panels. In the 2007-09 biennium, the WTECBs plans to distribute \$540,000 over a period of 21 months. Each granting organization must show an employer match of at least 25 percent.

The WTECB requires grantees to link proposals to regional cluster strategies. Panels focus on industries for which there is a regional concentration of firms or employment, and on employment

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opportunities which result in family wage jobs. The WTECBs ability to distribute grants is tied to the receipt of federal funds.

Summary of Bill:

The WTECB is to allocate grants on a competitive basis to establish and support Industry Skill Panels. Workforce development councils, community and technical colleges, economic development councils, private career schools, chambers of commerce, trade associations, and apprenticeship councils may apply for grants. Applicants must provide an employer match of at least 25 percent to be eligible.

Industry Skill Panels are to identify strategies and solutions for addressing workforce skill needs. The WTECB is to establish standards that identify the expectations for Skill Panel products and services. Continued funding depends upon meeting the standards. The WTECB is to report results annually to the Governor and Legislature. In addition, the definition of "Industry Skill Panels" is put into statute.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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