

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5776

As Reported by House Committee On:
State Government & Tribal Affairs

Title: An act relating to student fees, charges, and assessments.

Brief Description: Regarding student fees, charges, and assessments.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Higher Education & Workforce Development (originally sponsored by Senators McDermott, Schoesler, Fairley, Oemig, Jarrett and Kohl-Welles).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government & Tribal Affairs: 3/24/09, 3/26/09 [DP].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Allows student fees for each academic year to be created or increased by a majority vote of the student government.
- Authorizes the use of student fees for lobbying and to support statewide or national student organizations that engage in lobbying.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL AFFAIRS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Hunt, Chair; Appleton, Vice Chair; Flannigan, Hurst and Miloscia.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Armstrong, Ranking Minority Member; Alexander.

Staff: Marsha Reilly (786-7135)

Background:

In addition to tuition fees, students at institutions of higher education are charged services and activities fees. These fees are dedicated to fund student activities and programs as well as for repaying bonds and other indebtedness for facilities such as dormitories, hospitals, dining halls, parking facilities, and student, faculty, and employee housing. Students have a

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strong voice in recommending budgets for services and activities fees through the Services and Activities Fee Committee (Committee), and the governing boards of the institutions must adhere to the principle that the Committee's desires be given priority consideration.

Generally, the use of public funds for lobbying is prohibited. This does not preclude an agency officer or employee from communicating with the Legislature for requests for legislative action or appropriations necessary for the business of the agency, or providing information or communicating on matters pertaining to the agency. Agencies that expend public funds for these restricted lobbying purposes are required to file quarterly statements with the Public Disclosure Commission that identifies the persons who lobbied, the general nature of the lobbying, and the proportionate amount of time and money spent on lobbying.

Summary of Bill:

Voluntary student fees for each academic year may be created or increased by a majority vote of the student government or its equivalent, or by a referendum presented to the student body. The use of those fees is not subject to the statute governing the use of public funds for lobbying.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Last year, the students at The Evergreen State College adopted a voluntary fee for higher education advocacy and membership to the Washington Student Lobby. Before the fee was implemented, the Board of Trustees was advised by their Assistant Attorney General that the fee would require legislative approval. This bill clarifies the process in practice at all other institutions. Adding legislative approval to the process will add as much as two years towards implementation. The bill is important because it ensures that work with the Legislature regarding students' interests may continue. Recent internal opinions by assistant attorney generals have questioned the use of student fees for advocacy. The bill allows for continued student participation in the legislative process.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Mike Bogay and Steve Lindstrom, Washington Student Lobby; Shawn Hoey, Associated Students of Washington State University and Washington Student Lobby; and Larry Ganders, Washington State University.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.