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**HOUSE BILL 1555**

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**State of Washington 67th Legislature 2021 Regular Session**

**By** Representatives Chase, McCaslin, Klicker, and Sutherland

AN ACT Relating to the freedom in education program; adding a new section to chapter 2A.150 RCW; adding a new section to chapter 43.08 RCW; adding a new section to chapter 43.09 RCW; and creating new sections.

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The legislature acknowledges that many parents desire to homeschool their children or wish to send them to a private school. Parents' reasons for preferring a venue of education other than public school are varied and may be motivated by religious or moral convictions. Despite the desire to choose an educational environment that best meets their children's needs, very few parents have the financial means to afford the substantial costs of homeschooling or private schooling. The legislature recognizes that if the state provided a program to alleviate some of these education costs, parents who prefer a different venue for their children's education would have new opportunities to choose homeschooling or private schooling.

(2) The legislature finds that, in the 2020-21 school year, the state's public school per-pupil funding amount is $12,519. The legislature believes that providing up to 50 percent of this amount in the form of reimbursement for educational goods and services purchased by parents for the benefit of their children will allow parents the freedom to choose the best, rather than the least expensive, venue of education for their children.

(3) Furthermore, the legislature expects that providing such reimbursements will both save the state a significant amount of money and provide a measure of competition that will improve public schools.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 2A.150 RCW to read as follows:

(1) The freedom in education program is established to reimburse parents with students enrolled in an elementary or secondary private school or who provide home-based instruction for their children for the costs of educational goods and services.

(2) The state auditor shall develop and administer the reimbursement program with, at a minimum, the following elements:

(a) A process for participating parents to submit claims for reimbursement of tuition, training, software, books, subscriptions, tutoring, and other educational goods and services purchased for the benefit of an eligible student;

(b) A system to receive, verify, and track receipts for educational goods and services expenses incurred by participating parents;

(c) A method to calculate the maximum annual reimbursement per eligible student, which must be 50 percent of the state's public school per-pupil funding amount for the school year in which reimbursement is requested, less an administrative fee of up to two percent. The maximum annual reimbursement per eligible student must be prorated if the eligible student was enrolled in a public school for part of the school year. The purpose of the administrative fee is to cover the costs to the state auditor and the state treasurer in administering the reimbursement program.

(3) On a monthly basis, the state auditor must communicate to the state treasurer the reimbursement amount to be paid to each participating parent, and the state treasurer must issue to each participating parent a state treasury warrant in the specified amount.

(4) The definitions in this subsection apply throughout this section unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(a) "Eligible student" means a person residing in Washington who is eligible to attend a public school in Washington.

(b) "Home-based instruction" has the same meaning as in RCW 28A.225.010.

(c) "Parent" means a parent, guardian, or other person or entity having legal custody of an eligible student.

(d) "Participating parent" means a parent who has enrolled an eligible student in a private school or who provides home-based instruction to an eligible student in compliance with the requirements of RCW 28A.225.010 and 28A.200.010.

(e) "Private school" means a school approved under chapter 28A.195 RCW.

(f) "Public school" has the same meaning as in RCW 28A.150.010.

(g) "Reimbursement program" means the freedom in education program established in this section.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 43.08 RCW to read as follows:

(1) The state treasurer shall issue state treasury warrants as required under section 2 of this act from appropriations made for this specific purpose.

(2) The state treasurer may adopt rules necessary to carry out its responsibilities under section 2 of this act.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 43.09 RCW to read as follows:

(1) The state auditor shall develop and administer the freedom in education program established in section 2 of this act.

(2) The state auditor may adopt rules necessary to carry out its responsibilities under section 2 of this act.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  This act may be known and cited as the freedom in education act.

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