

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5509

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Higher Education, February 27, 2001

Title: An act relating to identification of students at institutions of higher education.

Brief Description: Requiring institutions of higher education to use personal identifiers that are not social security numbers.

Sponsors: Senators Kohl-Welles, Hochstatter, Shin, Kline, Hargrove, Horn, Fairley, Sheahan, B. Sheldon, Prentice, McAuliffe, Roach and Costa.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education: 2/8/01, 2/27/01 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5509 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Kohl-Welles, Chair; Shin, Vice Chair; Carlson, Horn, Jacobsen, Parlette, Sheahan and B. Sheldon.

Staff: Casey Bui (786-7448)

Background: Institutions of higher education use Social Security numbers as students, staff and faculty identifiers to interconnect information, including state and federal financial aid, career progress after graduation, employment services, grading and data collection for administrative planning, and status reports to various constituents.

Summary of Substitute Bill: Institutions of higher education are prohibited from using the Social Security number of any student, staff or faculty for any identification purpose except for employment, financial aid, research, assessment, accountability, transcripts or as otherwise required by state or federal laws. Each institution must develop a system of personal identifiers for its students to be used for grading and other administrative purposes. This system may not include the students' Social Security numbers.

A report outlining the institutions' personal identifier systems must be submitted to the Legislature by December 1, 2001. The institutions must coordinate with the Higher Education Coordinating Board and State Board for Community and Technical Colleges in submitting this report.

No new state funds may be allocated for this bill.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The substitute bill covers staff and faculty in addition to students. It also expands permissible use of Social Security numbers to include

research, assessment, accountability and transcripts. The effective date is extended to July 1, 2002, and no new state funds are allowed to be used for the provisions of this bill.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on July 1, 2002.

Testimony For: The use of Social Security numbers in public institutions of higher education adds to the danger of identity theft. Students value their privacy but do not have a real say in how and when their Social Security numbers are used. Institutions of higher education need to be prohibited from such widespread and systematic uses.

Concerns: While the bill is generally a good idea, absolute prohibition of the use of Social Security numbers is impractical and extreme. Institutions of higher education regularly use Social Security numbers judiciously to follow students throughout their careers within and among various institutions of higher learning and in their work world. The bill should be amended to continue to allow these practices. Also of concern is the very short time line for implementation and reporting back to the Legislature.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Toni Ryan, WSL - CWU Chapter (pro); Mike Johnson, WSL - EWU Chapter (pro); Ynona Johnson, Olympic College student (pro); David Roman, Olympic College student (pro); Jerry Sheehan, ACLU (pro); Mike Scroggins, SBCTC (pro with concerns); Carolyn Busch, UW (pro with concerns); Mary Conley-Law, Registrar, Saint Martins College (pro with concerns); Bruce Botka, HECB (neutral).