

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 6699

As Passed Senate, February 13, 2006

Title: An act relating to cost savings on course materials for students at state universities, regional universities, and The Evergreen State College.

Brief Description: Concerning cost savings on course materials for students at state universities, regional universities, and The Evergreen State College.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education (originally sponsored by Senators Pridemore, Schmidt, Zarelli, McAuliffe, Spanel and Delvin).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education: 1/30/06, 2/1/06 [DPS].
Passed Senate: 2/13/06, 45-1.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING, K-12 & HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6699 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators McAuliffe, Chair; Pridemore, Vice Chair, Higher Education; Weinstein, Vice Chair, Early Learning & K-12; Schmidt, Ranking Minority Member; Berkey, Delvin, Eide, Kohl-Welles, Pflug, Rasmussen, Rockefeller, Schoesler and Shin.

Staff: Stephanie Yurcisin (786-7438)

Background: There is concern, particularly among students at institutions of higher education, about the high costs of textbooks, workbooks, CD-ROMs, and other course related materials. A recent study by the federal Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that textbook prices have almost tripled from 1986 to 2004, in large part because of the increasing cost of developing the additional items that come with books, such as CD-ROMs and workbooks. The GAO study also found that, nationally, students at four-year schools spent, on average, \$900 for books and supplies in 2003-2004, which was more than a quarter of the average cost of tuition and fees.

Summary of Bill: The Board of Regents of the state universities and the Board of Trustees of the regional universities and The Evergreen State College, in collaboration with the affiliated bookstores and a student and faculty representative, must adopt rules requiring affiliated bookstores to allow students the option of buying unbundled course materials when possible. The rules would also require the bookstores to disclose the actual cost of the materials and how new editions vary from previous editions. Additionally, the affiliated bookstores must actively promote and publicize book buy-back programs and will be required to disclose retail costs for course materials on a per course basis.

The adopted rules must also require that faculty consider the least costly practices when assigning course materials, such as adopting the least expensive comparable edition available and working with publishers and bookstores to create bundles if they would be less costly.

"Materials" is defined as supplies or texts required or recommended by faculty for a given course, and "bundled" is defined as a group of objects joined together by packaging or required to be purchased as a single unit.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: Providing the option to students to be able to purchase only the portions of the course materials they need will provide large savings to them. Forcing students to buy bundled materials makes them spend more than necessary, as, for example, some of them may have a copy of the textbook from a friend but are required to purchase the whole bundle when all they need is one component. Editions used to last up to five years before being updated; now they are often updated after less than three years, and sometimes the changes are almost cosmetic in nature and do not affect the substance of the text. Allowing students to see the differences in editions will help them to make informed choices about whether they need to pay the extra money for the newer edition. One bookstore commented that it would be able to fulfill the duties called for in the bill if it passes and that it could provide national bargaining leverage with publishers. If a publisher does decide to offer the items unbundled, there is anecdotal evidence that the publisher will seek to neutralize the cost by raising the per-item price.

Testimony Against: Most major publishers have committed to offering unbundled materials by 2007, so this legislation may be unnecessary. It would be very harmful to put the burden on the bookstore to explain the differences between editions, since the publishers do not provide that information to the bookstores. Currently, bookstores can't request unbundled materials from the publisher, so if the bookstore unbundles them, it will lose money on the unsold items.

Testimony Other: The new language suggested by the student acknowledges that the bookstores cannot control the publishers' bundling. Public disclosure of the edition changes would be difficult for the bookstores to provide. While faculty needs protection to be allowed the freedom to make their own textbook selections, it would be very helpful to them to be able to make their decision with knowledge of the cost of the various books they are deciding between. It would be very harmful if faculty had to select the cheapest text, but that doesn't seem to be the language in this legislation. The suggested changes by the students provide the flexibility that is needed to make this legislation work.

Who Testified: PRO: Senator Craig Pridemore, prime sponsor; Daniel Shafar, Washington Student Lobby/Associated Students of Washington State University; Nick Cizek, Washington Student Lobby/Associated Students of Western Washington University; Sherry Berkey, Western Washington University; Rita Rose Pierce, Student Book Corporation.

CON: Patrick Miller, Evergreen State College.

OTHER: Randy Hodgins, University of Washington; Michael Salvador, Council of Faculty Representatives; Wendy Rader-Konofalski, United Faculty of Washington State/AFT Washington.