

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5344

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As Reported By Senate Committee On:  
Higher Education, February 26, 1999

**Title:** An act relating to higher educational opportunities for children who have been in foster care.

**Brief Description:** Creating the foster care scholarship program.

**Sponsors:** Senators Jacobsen, Shin, Eide, McAuliffe, Winsley, Thibaudeau, Gardner, Bauer, Haugen and Rasmussen.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Higher Education: 2/1/99, 2/26/99 [DPS].

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

**Majority Report:** That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5344 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Kohl-Welles, Chair; Shin, Vice Chair; Bauer, Finkbeiner, Jacobsen, McAuliffe, Sheahan, B. Sheldon.

**Staff:** Natalie Adams (786-7444)

**Background:** Foster children often lack the ability to achieve a higher education. Awarding scholarships to foster children may offer hope for the future and new opportunities that previously were not available to these children.

**Summary of Substitute Bill:** The foster care scholarship program is created. The Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) shall award grants to qualified individuals attending an in-state institution of higher education. The scholarship amount must not exceed the student's costs and the duration must not exceed 8 semesters or 12 quarters.

The HECB must work with the Department of Social and Health Services and the Superintendent of Public Instruction to inform eligible children about the program.

**Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:** An expansion allows foster children who are recipients of a G.E.D., and those aged 16 and 17 to receive scholarship awards. In addition, the required achievement level to remain eligible for scholarship awards is lowered from "above average" to "satisfactory" to encourage more foster children to participate in the program. The term "institution of higher education" is clarified to include public and private institutions, and community and technical colleges. Finally, funds are specifically appropriated to the HECB and may be used for scholarships and administrative costs.

**Appropriation:** \$500,000.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

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

**Testimony For:** Foster children have disadvantages that other children may not experience such as lack of financial and emotional support from parents. Often, the pervasive sense of hopelessness prevents foster children from planning for the future. The foster care scholarship program would offer incentives to foster children to remain in school and start planning a future. In addition, the program would provide foster children with the financial assistance that could make the difference when deciding whether they can pursue a higher education. Often the amount of money is not as important as the idea that there is support for them.

**Testimony Against:** None.

**Testified:** Linda Johnson, adoptive and foster parent (pro); Richard Peet, Foster Parents Association (pro); Bruce Botka, Higher Education Coordinating Board (pro); Jesse Salomon, Washington Student Lobby (pro).