
Higher Education Committee

HB 1079

Brief Description: Establishing a foster youth postsecondary education and training coordination committee.

Sponsors: Representatives Kagi, Kenney, Chase, Dickerson and Schual-Berke; by request of Governor Locke.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Creates a foster youth postsecondary education and training coordination committee within the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS).
- Requires the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) to place a priority on former foster youth for receipt of financial aid awards under the State Need Grant program and the State Work Study program.

Hearing Date: 2/17/05

Staff: Barbara McLain (786-7383).

Background:

Beginning at age 13, dependent youth in state foster care can receive Independent Living Services to help them prepare for independence. When youth emancipate, or "age out," from foster care at age 18, they are eligible to receive assistance with housing, education, and employment training until age 21. According to the 2003 Performance Report by the DSHS Children's Administration, 470 youth aged out of foster care in 2002. Of these youth, 161 planned to pursue higher education.

The HECB administers state financial aid programs for low-income students pursuing higher education. The two primary programs are the State Need Grant (\$236.5 million appropriated for 2003-05) and State Work Study (\$34.1 million appropriated for 2003-05). Students are eligible for a need grant if they have a family income less than 55 percent of the state median family income, are enrolled at least part-time, and pursue a degree or certificate. Need grant is not an entitlement, but the program attempts to serve all eligible students within available funds. For the 2003-04 academic year, approximately 53,500 students received need grant awards, but 6,000 eligible students went unserved.

The State Work Study program served approximately 7,700 financially needy students in 2003-04. In its administration of the program, the HECB is directed to place a priority on state resident

students, job placements that relate to the student's academic or vocational pursuits, and off-campus community service placements.

Summary of Bill:

The Legislature finds that disproportionately few foster youth enroll in postsecondary training programs. The Legislature intends to provide statewide planning and oversight through a coordination committee. The Legislature also intends to provide financial support by setting aside portions of the State Need Grant and State Work Study programs specifically for foster youth.

DSHS is directed to create a foster youth postsecondary education and training coordination committee. The committee is comprised of staff from the DSHS Children's Administration, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the HECB, as well as foster youth, former foster youth, foster parents, and representatives from nonprofit service agencies.

The committee has the following duties:

1. assess the statewide need among foster youth for assistance in pursuing postsecondary education and training;
2. identify sources of funding to provide such assistance;
3. review the effectiveness of existing activities and identify new activities to support former foster youth in pursuing postsecondary education and training; and
4. review progress toward improving educational and vocational outcomes for foster youth.

The committee expires June 30, 2011.

The HECB, when making annual awards of state need grants, will give consideration to former foster youth. Eligible former foster youth are guaranteed a need grant when funds from grants that were declined, forfeited or otherwise unused are disbursed. The HECB must also place a priority on providing work opportunities for former foster youth through the State Work Study program.

A former foster youth is defined as a person who is at least 18 but not more than 24 years of age and who was a dependent of the DSHS at the time the youth attained the age of 18.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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