

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1131

As Reported by House Committee On:
Higher Education

Title: An act relating to helping former foster care youth gain post-secondary education and providing scholarships to former foster care youth for this purpose.

Brief Description: Creating the passport to college promise program.

Sponsors: Representatives Dunshee, Haler, Kenney, Fromhold, Priest, Roberts, Jarrett, Kagi, Hunt, McDermott, Haigh, Ormsby, Chase, Wallace, Hudgins, Schual-Berke, Simpson, Conway, Morrell, Moeller and Santos.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 1/22/07, 1/24/07 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Provides for outreach and information to youth age 15 years and over in foster care regarding opportunities for higher education, including financial aid that may be available.
- Provides scholarships covering tuition and living expenses to eligible former foster youth between ages 16 and 26 years to attend higher education for up to five consecutive years.
- Gives monetary incentives to higher education institutions that enroll and retain eligible former foster youth.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Wallace, Chair; Sells, Vice Chair; Anderson, Ranking Minority Member; Buri, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Hasegawa, Jarrett, McIntire, Roberts and Sommers.

Staff: Sarah Ream (786-7303).

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Background:

The results of numerous studies indicate that former foster youth face greater hurdles in adulthood compared to those who were never in foster care. For example, former foster youth graduate from high school at a lower rate than their non-foster care peers. Former The results of numerous studies indicate that former foster youth face greater hurdles in adulthood compared to those who were never in foster care. For example, former foster youth graduate from high school at a lower rate than their non-foster care peers. Former foster youth also attend post-secondary education at a lower rate and, if they do attend, have much lower graduation rates. Former foster youth are also more likely to experience homelessness, unemployment, and incarceration than youth who were never in foster care.

Washington has taken a number of steps to help former foster youth successfully make the transition from foster care to post-secondary education and adulthood. In 2005, the Legislature created an endowed scholarship program for financially needy foster youth and former foster youth ages 16 to 23 years who had been in the state's foster care system six months or longer since turning 14 years old. The Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) publicizes and promotes the program to eligible students with the assistance of an advisory board. The amount of an award may not exceed the student's financial need. The HECB anticipates making the first awards in the 2008-2009 academic year.

In 2005, the duties of the Children's Administration Oversight Committee on Education of Foster Youth were expanded to include promotion of opportunities for foster youth to participate in post-secondary education or training. The HECB, when making awards of state need grants, was directed to give consideration to former foster youth.

In 2006, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) was authorized to allow up to 50 youth in foster care reaching 18 years of age to stay in foster or group care so they could participate in or complete a post-high school academic or vocational program. In 2007 and 2008, 50 additional youth per year may be permitted to continue to remain in foster or group care after reaching the age of 18 to complete post-high school academic or vocational programs.

In addition to Washington's efforts, private sector organizations also recognize the need to expand post-secondary opportunities for former foster youth. In 2001, former Governor Gary Locke established the Governor's Scholarship for Foster Youth. The scholarship is managed by the College Success Foundation (formerly called the Washington Education Foundation). Between 20 and 30 scholarships are awarded annually, with awards ranging from \$1,000 to \$5,000 per year, depending on the recipient's needs. Scholarships can be renewed for up to four additional years.

Summary of Bill:

This bill creates the Passport to College Promise Program (Program). The Program is designed to provide: (1) outreach and information to current foster youth regarding the

opportunities available to them for post-secondary education, and (2) scholarships to eligible former foster youth to cover their full costs of resident undergraduate tuition, fees and living expenses.

Outreach and Retention

The bill provides two- and four-year colleges and universities in Washington with \$3,500 annually for each former foster youth who earns 45 quarter or 30 semester credits from the school. Another \$2,500 is provided for every additional 45 quarter/30 semester credits earned by the former foster youth (up to 90 quarter/60 semester units at a two-year school and 180 quarter/120 semester units at a four-year school).

The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) will create and maintain a website to provide comprehensive information to foster youth regarding opportunities for higher education. The SBCTC will annually award at least one \$25,000 award to the institution(s) of higher education that have been most successful in recruiting, retraining, and graduating former foster youth.

The DSHS will contract with at least one non-governmental entity to provide supplemental educational transition planning to foster care youth beginning at age 15.

Scholarships

All eligible former foster youth between ages 16 and 26 will receive financial aid to cover their costs of attending higher education. To be eligible, a student must:

- have been in foster care for at least 6 months since his/her 15th birthday;
- maintain a 2.0 grade point average;
- be between age 16 and 26;
- be a resident of Washington;
- not have earned a bachelor's or professional degree; and
- not be pursuing a degree in theology.

The institution of higher education attended by the student must first provide the student with all aid the student qualifies for (the aid cannot include work-study in an amount greater than 20 percent of the cost of attendance or student loans). The school must then provide a supplemental scholarship to the student so the entire amount of the student's cost of attendance is covered. The cost of attendance for a former foster youth will include a cost of living component equal to 150 percent of non-foster youths' cost of living. The school will apply to the HECB for reimbursement of the amount of the supplemental scholarship provided to foster youth.

The scholarships to eligible foster youth will cover the first five consecutive years of an eligible student's undergraduate education. The scholarships can be used at any Washington institution of higher education (including accredited private schools). However, the maximum award will not be greater than the annual cost for a resident student to attend the University of

Washington, plus 50 percent of what the HECB estimates to be the cost of room and board for an undergraduate student living on campus.

Reporting

The SBCTC and the HECB will each report to the Legislature by January 15, 2010, regarding the number of students who have received scholarships under this program and those students' academic progress.

Appropriation: The sum of \$3 million per year.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 19, 2007.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The state has a moral and financial responsibility to help former foster youth attend higher education. Every state effort to help former foster youth attend higher education failed. This bill is a way for the state to make good on its commitment to foster youth.

The era of the passive approach to education is over. The higher education system must reach out to current and former foster youth. This bill provides for proactive educational planning for foster youth. Many foster youth are credit deficient in high school and need proactive planning to graduate and enroll in higher education.

It is hard to get former foster youth to stay in higher education once they enroll because they tend to be an economically vulnerable population with less maturity and more educational deficiencies compared to their peers. They also tend to have lower self-esteem and a harder time making long-term plans compared to youth not in foster care.

This bill creates a culture of thriving for youth in foster care and allows them to leave a positive footprint in society. College is a way up and a way out, and is a very powerful tool for a child. If just 18 to 20 percent of former foster youth who are incarcerated went to higher education instead of jail or prison, the Passport to College Promise Program would pay for itself.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Dunshee, prime sponsor; Reuven Carlye, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Janis Avery, Treehouse; Daniel Stusser; Adam Cornell; Betty Gebhardt, Higher Education Coordinating Board; Terry Teale, Council of Presidents.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.