

SENATE BILL REPORT

2SHB 2486

As of February 28, 2014

Title: An act relating to inmate postsecondary education degree programs to reduce recidivism.

Brief Description: Addressing the implementation of inmate postsecondary education degree programs to reduce recidivism.

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Pettigrew, Roberts, Fey, Springer, Freeman, Pollet and Santos).

Brief History: Passed House: 2/14/14, 59-37.

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections: 2/25/14.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Staff: Shani Bauer (786-7468)

Background: The Department of Corrections (DOC) will provide basic academic skills to offenders in obtaining a high school diploma or its equivalent, including English as a second language; vocational training necessary to participate in a work program or obtain work upon release; and additional work and education programs necessary for compliance with an offender's individual reentry plan. DOC is explicitly prohibited from paying for postsecondary education. Any inmate expressing interest in postsecondary courses must self-pay for the costs of a postsecondary education degree program or pay by receiving funding from a third party.

DOC developed a process for offenders interested in participating in self-paid postsecondary academic, vocational, and theology programs through correspondence education involving an educational course or series of classes necessary to obtain or achieve a proficiency standard. Courses are completed through the mail with an accredited educational institution that meets all criteria necessary to gain accreditation recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, or one of the approved accrediting commissions or councils listed in DOC's policy.

The Rand Corporation completed a meta-analysis on the effectiveness of correctional education in 2013. After examining the higher-quality research studies, they found that, on average, inmates who participated in correctional education programs had a 43 percent lower probability of recidivating than inmates who did not. They found notable effects across all

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levels of education, from adult basic education and General Education Development programs to postsecondary and vocational education programs. The Washington State Institute for Public Policy also analyzed the effectiveness of correctional education and determined that basic and postsecondary educational programming returns \$19.62 for every dollar spent and vocational education returns \$13.21 for every dollar spent. The studies are not specific enough to separate out the effect on recidivism and cost effectiveness of postsecondary education on its own.

Summary of Bill: The Legislature recognizes there is a positive correlation between education opportunities and reduced recidivism and therefore intends to offer appropriate postsecondary opportunities to inmates. DOC is no longer prohibited from paying for postsecondary education degree programs and may implement a program to provide postsecondary education. In prioritizing its educational programming resources, providing an offender with work and education programs necessary for compliance with an offender's reentry plan is a higher priority than the achievement of pure vocational skills.

An inmate may be selected to participate in a state-funded postsecondary degree program based on priority determined by DOC. Inmates not meeting DOC's priority criteria may elect to participate in a postsecondary education program if the inmate pays the costs of the program or receives funding from a third party.

By December 1, 2014, and December 1 of every year thereafter, DOC, in consultation with the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, must submit a report evaluating its postsecondary education program. The evaluation must include the criteria established by DOC for offender participation, progress made implementing the program, and outcome data measuring program impacts.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This bill is introduced in the hopes of reducing recidivism. Education is a great tool for ensuring that offenders do not return to a life of crime. The higher the degree of education, the lower the likelihood of recidivism. Earlier law was short-sighted in limiting any state support for postsecondary education. For every dollar spent on education you avoid \$4–\$5 on future incarceration costs. Every year, 8000 people are released from prison or jail. The question is whether we are going to do what we can to prepare those offenders for reentry. It is in everyone's interest that people in prison succeed. Too often doors are slammed in the face of offenders because they have not adequately changed. This is an investment in public safety and ultimately benefits us all. Inmates on the whole want to obtain employment upon release and be productive members of society. School helps offenders learn to be accountable. Offenders who participate in education programs have a 43 percent lower rate of recidivism. Fifty-six percent of the prison population currently participates in education programming. Now more than ever, a

greater percentage of jobs require education beyond high school. In order to continue to prepare offenders to obtain jobs after release, we need to improve programs provided. If we do not invest and give people a reason to change, nothing changes. This is a fantastic opportunity to change the pathway of these individuals and give them an opportunity to turn their life around. DOC provides some postsecondary education to offenders through privately funded programs. To date, 188 degrees have been issued to offenders from these programs.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Pettigrew, prime sponsor; Alex Hur, Statewide Poverty Action Network; Dan Pacholke, DOC; Gina McConnel, Autumn Fisher, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) student; Nova Gattman, Workforce Board, Legislative Liaison; Pamela Transue, Tacoma Community College, President; Marty Brown, SBCTC, Executive Director; Steven Aldrich, Friends Committee on WA Public Policy; Carol Estes, Director, University Beyond Bars; Stephanie Delaney, Seattle Central Community College; Chanel Rhymes, The Evergreen State College, WA Student Assn.; Gregory Christopher, Faith Action Network; Dan Satterberg, King County Prosecuting Attorney, WA Assn. of Prosecuting Attorneys.