

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2619

As Reported by House Committee On:
Higher Education

Title: An act relating to providing postsecondary education to enhance education opportunities and public safety.

Brief Description: Providing postsecondary education to enhance education opportunities and public safety.

Sponsors: Representatives Haler, Pettigrew, Klippert, Reykdal, Zeiger, Frame and Pollet; by request of State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 2/2/16, 2/3/16 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Permits the Department of Corrections (DOC) to implement postsecondary education degree programs (postsecondary education) at state correctional institutions within existing resources.
- Requires the DOC to determine priority criteria for selecting inmates to participate in postsecondary education.
- Requires inmates not meeting the DOC's priority criteria for postsecondary education to pay for program costs themselves if they elect to participate.
- Prohibits inmates sentenced to life without the possibility of release from participating in postsecondary education offered by the DOC or its contracted providers.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Hansen, Chair; Pollet, Vice Chair; Zeiger, Ranking Minority Member; Haler, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Frame, Hargrove, Holy, Reykdal, Sells, Stambaugh, Tarleton and Van Werven.

Staff: Megan Mulvihill (786-7304).

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 Department of Corrections (DOC) is required to offer certain education and work programs to inmates based on funding available and the following goals:

- achievement of basic skills through obtaining high school diplomas or the equivalent;
- achievement of vocational skills necessary for work programs and to qualify for work upon release;
- additional work and education programs necessary to comply with an offender's individual reentry plan, except for postsecondary education degree programs (postsecondary education); and
- other appropriate vocational, work, or educational programs that are not necessary for compliance with an offender's individual reentry plan, except for postsecondary education.

The DOC is allowed to implement postsecondary education at state correctional institutions if funding is appropriated for the purpose, and inmates must pay to participate.

The DOC contracts with the community and technical colleges to offer basic education for adults (BEA) and job training. There are 12 state correctional institutions and each offers BEA programs, job-search courses, and anger management courses. In addition, workforce programs are available, but vary by correctional institution. The workforce programs include subjects such as horticulture, carpentry, mechanics, maintenance, and baking. According to the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, in 2013-14 there were just over 9,500 incarcerated offenders participating in programs offered by the community and technical colleges. These offenders earned:

- 1,085 GED certificates;
- 1,812 vocational certificates; and
- 47 associate degrees (no state funding was used).

Summary of Bill:

The Department of Corrections (DOC) is allowed to implement postsecondary education at state correctional institutions. The DOC must determine priority criteria for selecting inmates to participate in state-funded postsecondary education, in which the DOC may consider the following:

- priority should be given to inmates within five years or less of release;
- the inmate does not already possess a postsecondary education degree; and
- the inmate's individual reentry plan includes participation in postsecondary education that is: (1) offered at the inmate's state correctional institution; and (2) is approved by the DOC as eligible and effective postsecondary education.

Inmates who do not meet the priority criteria for state-funded postsecondary education must pay for costs of the program themselves, if he or she elects to participate. An inmate sentenced to life without the possibility of release is not allowed to participate in postsecondary education offered by the DOC or its contracted providers.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This is important because it offers hope to people who often do not have hope. It may lead to a second chance in life. Education can be a positive, life-changing impact to offenders. Postsecondary education programs help improve literacy, self-sufficiency, and rehabilitation. Postsecondary education can provide offenders with the tools they need to find employment post release, which helps reduce recidivism and make offenders productive, contributing members of society. Offenders are eager to participate in these programs, and it can help save taxpayers money. An associate degree is cheaper than having an offender recidivate.

There are already excellent partnerships in place with the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges and nonprofit organizations, but this will allow the DOC to move forward without additional funding. It is similar to the bill the committee heard last year, but this has parameters around who can participate. In addition, offenders are another opportunity for the state to meet its educational attainment goals.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Haler, prime sponsor; Michael Paris, Washington Department of Corrections; Sam Merrill, Friends Committee of Washington Public Policy; Nova Gattman, Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board; Arlen Harris, Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges; Madeline Thompson, Washington Student Achievement Council; Norm Arnold, Living Stones; and Edward Panel.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.