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**HOUSE BILL 2177**

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**State of Washington 65th Legislature 2017 Regular Session**

**By** Representatives Chapman, Steele, Frame, and Tharinger

AN ACT Relating to creating the rural county high employer demand jobs program; adding a new section to chapter 28B.50 RCW; and creating a new section.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The legislature recognizes that:

(a) According to research from Georgetown University, by the year 2020, seventy percent of jobs in Washington state will require at least some education and training beyond high school, which aligns with Washington's educational attainment goals established under RCW 28B.77.020; and

(b) Research by the state board for community and technical colleges and other entities has found that attending college for at least one year and earning a credential results in a substantial boost in earnings for adults who enter a community college with a high school diploma or less.

(2) In addition, the legislature finds that:

(a) Rural counties face unique challenges to achieving full economic and community development in the face of societal trends that concentrate job and population growth in larger metropolitan areas. For example, seventy-five percent of the job growth in Washington by 2018 is projected to be confined to just five large counties while two-thirds of the state's recent population growth has occurred in the three largest counties, and seven counties have actually lost population in the past year.

(b) Opportunity, community vitality, quality of life, and prosperity are essential for all Washington communities.

(3) Therefore, the legislature, through this act, intends to help small towns and economically struggling rural communities create opportunities and jobs for young people and for unemployed residents so that they may obtain family wage employment in their local communities.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 28B.50 RCW to read as follows:

(1) The definitions in this subsection apply throughout this section unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(a) "Eligible county" means a county with a population of fewer than eighty thousand persons, based on population estimates reported on April 1, 2016, by the office of financial management, that, as of January 1, 2017:

(i) Had an unemployment rate of eight percent or higher, as reported by the employment security department's most recent monthly employment report, not seasonally adjusted; and

(ii) Had a median wage of less than eighteen dollars per hour, as determined by the employment security department's report on median hourly wages by county.

(b) "Gift aid" means financial aid received from the federal Pell grant, the state need grant program in chapter 28B.92 RCW, the college bound scholarship program in chapter 28B.118 RCW, the opportunity grant program in chapter 28B.50 RCW, the opportunity scholarship program in chapter 28B.145 RCW, or any other state grant, scholarship, or worker retraining program that provides funds for educational purposes with no obligation of repayment. Student loans and work study programs are not "gift aid."

(c) "High employer demand field" means a program of study or apprenticeship, identified by the college board or a community or technical college located in an eligible county, in which the number of students prepared for employment from local programs is inadequate to meet the demand for employees locally in that field.

(d) "Office" means the office of student financial assistance, established in chapter 28B.76 RCW.

(e) "Program" means the rural county high employer demand jobs program created in this section.

(2)(a) The rural county high employer demand jobs program is established to assist students in obtaining local jobs by earning certificates, associate degrees, or other industry-recognized credentials in high employer demand fields.

(b) The college board or the community or technical college located in an eligible county must identify high employer demand fields. The college board or the community or technical college may publicize those high employer demand fields as part of existing community outreach efforts.

(3) To be eligible for the program, a student must:

(a) Be a resident of an eligible county;

(b) Be enrolled in a high employer demand field that leads to a certificate, associate degree, or other industry-recognized credential at a community or technical college located in an eligible county;

(c) Have a family income that does not exceed seventy percent of the state median family income adjusted for family size, as determined by the office;

(d) Submit the free application for federal student aid (FAFSA) or the Washington application for state financial aid; and

(e) Within six months before initial receipt of the scholarship under this program, have received either:

(i) A diploma from a high school located in an eligible county or the equivalent of a high school diploma; or

(ii) Unemployment benefits under Title 50 RCW.

(4)(a) The program provides student tuition and required fees for up to forty-five credits or the equivalent of one year of full time study at a community or technical college located in an eligible county.

(b) To remain eligible for the program, the student must maintain a cumulative grade point average of 2.0.

(5)(a) The office must administer the program and may adopt rules necessary to administer the program.

(b) Subject to the availability of funding and the limits established in subsection (4) of this section, the office shall award scholarships to students who meet the criteria in subsection (3) of this section for an amount equal to the cost of tuition and required fees, less any gift aid received.

(c) The program shall not result in a reduction of any federal or state gift aid.

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