
Higher Education Committee

HB 2177

Brief Description: Creating the rural county high employer demand jobs program.

Sponsors: Representatives Chapman, Steele, Frame and Tharinger.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Creates the Rural County High Employer Demand Jobs Program to assist students in earning certificates, associate degrees, or other industry-recognized credentials in high employer demand fields in certain eligible counties.

Hearing Date: 1/10/18

Staff: Trudes Tango (786-7384).

Background:

Student Financial Aid.

There are various state financial aid and grant programs for eligible students pursuing post secondary education. Many of the financial aid programs are administered by the Office of Student Financial Assistance, which is within the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC).

In addition, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) administers certain grant programs for students in the community and technical college (CTC) system. For example, the SBCTC administers a workforce education program known as the Opportunity Grant (OG) program. The OG Program covers full-time tuition and fees for eligible students up to 45 credits, and students may receive up to \$1,000 for books, tools, and supplies. To be eligible to participate, the student must, among other things, have a family income that is at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level and be determined to have financial need based on the free application for federal student aid (FAFSA).

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.

The student must enroll in an approved program of study. Approved programs of study include those programs addressing a skill gap shortage in a targeted industry. Examples of approved programs include nursing, surgical technology, business technology management, education, and vocational studies such as automotive technology and manufacturing.

Rural Counties.

In November 2017, the Economic Security Department (ESD) issued a report comparing the economic recovery in rural counties versus urban counties. For its report, the ESD used the same definition of rural county as used in an existing statute providing sales and use tax for public facilities in rural counties. That statute defines a rural county as a county with a population density of less than 100 people per square mile, or a county smaller than 225 square miles. This definition is used to define rural counties under an existing sales and use tax statute. According to the ESD, there are 30 counties meeting that definition, as of 2016 (all counties except King, Pierce, Snohomish, Kitsap, Whatcom, Thurston, Clark, Benton, and Spokane).

Summary of Bill:

The Rural County High Employer Demand Jobs Program (Program) is established to assist students in earning certificates, associate degrees, or other industry-recognized credentials in high employer demand fields. The program provides tuition and required fees for up to 45 credits or the equivalent of one year of full-time study at a CTC located in an eligible county.

An eligible county is a county with a population of fewer than 80,000 persons and that: (1) had an unemployment rate of 8 percent or higher and (2) had a median wage of less than \$18 per hour. A "high employer demand field" means a program of study or apprenticeship in which the number of students prepared for employment from local programs is inadequate to meet the demand of employers locally. The SBCTC or a CTC in an eligible county must identify high employer demand fields.

To be eligible to receive grants under the program, a student must:

- be a resident of an eligible county;
- be enrolled in a high employer demand field at a CTC located in an eligible county;
- have a family income that does not exceed 70 percent of the state median family income adjusted for family size;
- submit the free application for federal student aid (FAFSA) or the Washington application for state financial aid (WAFSA); and
- within six months of receiving a grant under the program, have either: (1) received a diploma from a high school located in an eligible county or the equivalent of a high school diploma; or (2) received unemployment benefits.

The Office of Student Financial Assistance (Office) must administer the Program. The Office must award students who meet the criteria an amount equal to the cost of tuition and required fees, less any gift aid received. The Program may not result in a reduction of any federal or state gift aid. "Gift aid" is defined and includes financial aid received from the Federal Pell Grant, State Need Grant, and other state grant programs listed in statute.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 5, 2018.

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