

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5635

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Higher Education & Workforce Development, February 19, 2019

Title: An act relating to expanding opportunities for students to pursue mental and behavioral health professions.

Brief Description: Expanding opportunities for students to pursue mental and behavioral health professions.

Sponsors: Senators Brown, Bailey, Rivers, Walsh, Becker, King, Warnick, Frockt, Wilson, L., Hasegawa, Zeiger and O'Ban.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education & Workforce Development: 2/05/19, 2/19/19 [DP-WM, DNP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Extends the Opportunity Grant Scholarship from 45 to 90 credits for students pursuing a certificate or degree required for employment in a behavioral health profession.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Palumbo, Chair; Randall, Vice Chair; Holy, Ranking Member; Brown and Wellman.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senator Ericksen.

Staff: Kellee Gunn (786-7429)

Background: Opportunity Grant Scholarship. Since 2006, the state has provided Opportunity Grant Scholarships (OGS) to low-income resident students participating in training for high-wage, high demand career pathways at community and technical colleges.

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.

To qualify as an approved high-wage, high-demand career pathway for the OGS the credential must provide a minimum beginning wage of \$13.00 per hour in Washington State and \$15.00 per hour in King County. Eligible students pursuing approved pathways may receive funds to cover tuition and mandatory fees up to 45 credits and up to \$1,000 per academic year for books and supplies. The program also offers student support services up to \$1,500 per year, which may include one-on-one tutoring, career advising, college success classes, emergency childcare, and emergency transportation. A CTC must maintain a student retention target of 70 percent for each participating program. Since 2007, state support for the OGS has been \$11.5 million a year.

Washington State Opportunity Scholarship. The Washington State Opportunity Scholarship (WSOS) provides scholarships to low and middle-income resident students pursuing eligible high-demand majors in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and health care. An eligible student must be working towards a first bachelor's degree at an eligible Washington state college or university. Students may attend a public community or technical college if they indicate plans to transfer to a four-year college or university by the time they have earned 90 quarter credits. The WSOS program is overseen by a board and a program administrator. The WSOS program administrator is a private nonprofit corporation with expertise in managing scholarships and college advising. The WSOS is funded with private contributions and state matching funds.

In 2018, the Legislature expanded the WSOS to include programs related to health professions, rural county jobs, and professional-technical certificate or degree programs.

Summary of Bill: Opportunity Grant Scholarship. The OGS is extended to 90 credits for students pursuing a certificate or degree required for employment in a behavioral health profession. Extended funding is limited to no more than four years from initial receipt of grant funds.

A behavioral health profession may include a psychiatrist, psychologist, psychiatric nurse, chemical dependency professional, social worker, or other mental health professional as defined by the secretary of the Department of Health.

Washington State Opportunity Scholarship. Programs of study qualifying as high employer demand programs for the WSOS must be identified, rather than determined, by the WSOS board.

Technical changes are made to resolve drafting errors made in 2018 legislation pertaining to the creation of new programs administered by the WSOS.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 25, 2019.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: By expanding it from 45 to 90 credits for programs that lead to a credential required for a career as a mental health professional, it should incentivize students to enroll in those specific programs, and incentivize schools to have those programs approved as an Opportunity Grant Program. As the administrator for the Opportunity grant for the state, and as a mental health degree holder, this is a fantastic step forward for the program and the state. We do not want to displace any general Opportunity Grant Scholarship recipients, and so would like to see corresponding funding increase.

We are experiencing an unfortunate two-trend situation nationwide—the demand for mental health and substance abuse counselors is increasing dramatically. One in five people are struggling with mental health issues. The disease burden was higher for mental health and substance abuse was higher than any other condition. The number of providers is barely holding steady, and we assume the state will be 250,000 people short in this profession in the next few years. One of the recommended approaches is to address the financial burden and costs of getting the required education. These mental health and behavioral health jobs are not high-paying professions. The average debt a student in one of these professions is \$88,000.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Sharon Brown, Prime Sponsor; Seth Dawson, Washington State Psychiatric Association; Bob Cooper, National Association of Social Workers Washington Chapter; Ruben Flores, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.