

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## SB 5498

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Education

**Title:** An act relating to posthumous high school diplomas.

**Brief Description:** Awarding diplomas posthumously.

**Sponsors:** Senators Wilson, C., Billig, Das, Lovelett, Lovick, Nobles, Wagoner and Wellman.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Education: 2/17/22, 2/24/22 [DPA].

**Brief Summary of Bill**  
**(As Amended By Committee)**

- Authorizes school districts to issue posthumous high school diplomas for qualifying students at the request of parents, guardians, or custodians and if applicable requirements are met.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

**Majority Report:** Do pass as amended. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Santos, Chair; Dolan, Vice Chair; Ybarra, Ranking Minority Member; Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Berg, Bergquist, Callan, McCaslin, McEntire, Ortiz-Self, Rude, Steele and Stonier.

**Staff:** Ethan Moreno (786-7386).

**Background:**

To qualify for graduation from a public high school, students must satisfy course and credit requirements established by the State Board of Education, meet any locally established

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requirements, complete a high school and beyond plan, and meet the requirements of at least one graduation pathway option. School districts, upon students' satisfactory completion of the state and local requirements, must issue diplomas to students to signify graduation from high school.

School districts may also issue high school diplomas to honorably discharged members of the United States Armed Forces who left high school before graduation to serve in World War II, the Korean conflict, or the Vietnam era. These diplomas may be issued to or on behalf of an eligible recipient even if the recipient holds a high school equivalency certification or is deceased.

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### **Summary of Amended Bill:**

School districts, at the request of the parent, guardian, or custodian, may issue a posthumous high school diploma for a deceased student if the student:

- was enrolled in a public school of the district at the time of death;
- was deemed on-track for graduation before the time of death; and
- died after matriculating into high school.

A posthumous high school diploma must bear the inscription "honoris causa" and may not be issued before the graduation date of the class in which the student was enrolled. Additionally, school districts are not required to award the diploma at the same ceremony or event as other graduating students.

Posthumous diplomas issued for deceased students may not be applied toward student graduation counts or for any other purpose of federal and state accountability data collection.

A short title is included indicating that the act may be known and cited as Evitan's Law.

### **Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill:**

The amended bill makes the following changes to the original bill:

- authorizes, rather than requires, school districts to issue posthumous high school diplomas for qualifying students;
- changes criteria for the issuance of a posthumous diploma by:
  - removing provisions requiring the student to have completed at least 75 percent of the total number of credits required for graduation and instead requiring the student to have been deemed on-track for graduation; and
  - removing provisions requiring the student to have completed grade 11 or the equivalent and instead requiring the student to have matriculated into high school before death;
- requires posthumous diplomas to be inscribed with "honoris causa";

- adds intent language; and
  - makes non-substantive structural and grammar changes.
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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

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

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) There are families across the state who have lost children in their high school years. This bill will provide clarity to districts regarding the issuance of posthumous diplomas. For many families, this will be a recognition of their child's achievements that they might not otherwise see. This bill does not impact other diplomas, but it may provide closure and relief. This is not about families walking across the stage or other public actions, but rather about permitting families to request diplomas for deceased children that completed grade 11.

Principals are supportive of issuing posthumous diplomas, although some believe the criteria for issuance should be determined locally.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Senator Claire Wilson, prime sponsor; and Roz Thompson, Association of Washington School Principals.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.