

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5566

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As of February 21, 2023

**Title:** An act relating to the student basic needs at public postsecondary institutions act.

**Brief Description:** Establishing the student basic needs at public postsecondary institutions act.

**Sponsors:** Senators Shewmake, Randall, Wellman, Saldaña, Lias, Hasegawa, Hunt, Nguyen, Nobles, Trudeau, Valdez and Wilson, C..

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Higher Education & Workforce Development: 2/10/23, 2/17/23 [DP-WM, w/oRec].

Ways & Means: 2/21/23.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Creates student basic needs task forces and a Student Basic Needs Work Group.
- Establishes the Benefits Navigator Grant Program to fund implementation of the task force recommendations.
- Creates the Free and Reduced-Price Meals Pilot Program.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

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

Signed by Senators Randall, Chair; Nobles, Vice Chair; Holy, Ranking Member.

**Minority Report:** That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senator Hawkins.

**Staff:** Alicia Kinne-Clawson (786-7407)

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## SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

**Staff:** Michele Alishahi (786-7433)

**Background:** The United Way of King County (UWKC) has identified that postsecondary students face food insecurity, housing insecurity, and other basic needs insecurities. In response to these needs, UWKC launched the bridge to finish campaign creating campus-based benefits hubs across ten participating institutions. The access hubs provide a single coordinated access point for basic needs support services. Services include access to food, monetary support, and coaching.

In 2021, the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) released a report showing that 41 percent of community college students in Washington faced food insecurity in 2019.

**Summary of Bill:** Student Basic Needs Task Forces. Institutions of higher education, university campuses, and tribal institutions of higher education (institutions) must each establish a Student Basic Needs Task Force (Task Force) to develop a Hunger-Free Campus Strategic Plan (plan). The Task Force must:

- annually survey students about access to basic needs;
- design a benefits hub to assist students in accessing public benefits, emergency financial resources, and other resources using a full-time navigator;
- ensure access to a campus food pantry;
- establish methods to identify likely low-income and food insecure students and provide outreach about available services; and
- identify opportunities for community partnerships.

Institutions must annually report on the findings and activities from the basic needs task forces to the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) and WSAC.

Postsecondary Basic Needs Work Group. Subject to appropriations, SBCTC and WSAC must convene a Postsecondary Basic Needs Workgroup (workgroup). The workgroup must:

- develop budgetary and administrative policy to administer the workgroup;
- coordinate administration and collection of the basic needs survey;
- identify how many benefits navigators are necessary to meet student needs;
- assess the distribution and effectiveness of state funds in support of student basic needs;
- issue recommendations regarding strategies to address student basic needs; and
- support a partnership with a not-for-profit with expertise in student basic needs.

Benefits Navigator Grant Program. Subject to appropriations, SBCTC and WSAC must design and implement a Basic Needs Grant Program to provide funding for implementation of the student basic needs task forces. The grant program must maximize use of the Basic Food Education and Training Program to fund navigators and maximize the use of federal funds.

Pilot Program to Provide Free and Reduced-price Meals. Chosen by WSAC and SBCTC, four community and technical colleges, and two public four-year institutions of higher education must participate in a pilot program to provide free and low-cost meal plans or food vouchers to eligible low-income students.

**Appropriation:** The bill contains a section or sections to limit implementation to the availability of amounts appropriated for that specific purpose.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**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 (Higher Education & Workforce Development):**

PRO: A few years ago I saw a presentation on the share of students experiencing hunger on our college campuses. It makes my job harder when my students are hungry in class. It is difficult to master new, highly difficult information when a student does not have adequate access to food. Higher education is an expensive but absolutely worthwhile enterprise. If we don't spend the money on a sandwich to ensure these students have adequate food to eat then we are putting these students education further out of reach. Washington has been leading the way in connecting students with supports to meet their basic needs. This bill brings a bunch of great ideas together. We know students have extraordinary basic needs, this bill helps students identify resources to meet those needs. We recommend reorganizing governance to allow for flexibility and differentiation between programs at colleges. Fully fund benefit navigators. Postpone the survey until 2024-25. Clover park has a food pantry to assist students but due to limited resources students can only access it once per month. A resource navigator would provide students a single point of contact to ensure their needs are aligned with resources available. Our national survey shows that 3 out of 5 students struggle with getting enough to eat. This bill comes at a critical time as federal benefits run out or expire. We believe that navigators are worth every dollar you can invest in them. Students find it difficult to navigate the existing system to find them help they need. There wasn't a day I didn't consider dropping out of college to earn money to eat instead of working towards a credential that was 4 or 5 years out. We should not normalize students skipping meals and living off ramen. They need nutritious meals to succeed each day.

**Persons Testifying (Higher Education & Workforce Development):** PRO: Senator Sharon Shewmake, Prime Sponsor; Bryce McKibben, The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice; Sandy Kaiser, The Evergreen State College; Charlie Reyerson, WashPIRG Students; Collin Bannister, ASWSU; Joseph Gabriel Burke, President, Washington Student Association; Claire Lane, Anti-Hunger & Nutrition Coalition; Jennifer Dellinger, State Board of Community and Technical Colleges; Jacob Katz, State Board of Community and Technical Colleges; Riham Hashi, United Way of King County; Adán

Mendoza, Associated Students of Central Washington University; Sopear Chay, South Puget Sound Community College; Michelle Carrillo, Student, Central Washington University.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Higher Education & Workforce Development):** No one.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Ways & Means):** PRO: Basic needs insecurity is not a one campus issue and affects students' ability to study, earn credentials, and enter the workforce. Benefits available at institutions should be used thoroughly and efficiently by being readily available in one place. There is a huge return on investment in basic needs for students. Navigators provide direct support to increase access to programs like SNAP benefits, childcare, basic food, and employment and training programs. By funding navigators, colleges are eligible for a 50% reimbursement from the USDA, building capacity for them to serve students without burdening them.

**Persons Testifying (Ways & Means):** PRO: Lauren Hibbs, State Board for Community & Tech Colleges; Puneet Birk, Associated Students of the University of Washington Bothell; Madeline Sprute, Tacoma Community College.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Ways & Means):** No one.