

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5249

As of February 21, 2003

Title: An act relating to the higher education for lifelong progress program.

Brief Description: Creating the higher education for lifelong progress program.

Sponsors: Senators Kohl-Welles, Shin, Carlson and Schmidt.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education: 2/24/03.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Staff: Dario de la Rosa (786-7484)

Background: Federal welfare reform rules now allow college attendance to count as a Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) work activity. Studies demonstrate a relationship between educational attainment and economic well being. Graduation from college significantly increases the probability of higher lifetime income, and decreases the chances of a graduate's children needing public assistance in the future.

Information presented to the Senate Higher Education Committee in September 2002, about the state of Maine's Parents as Scholars Program, showed that successful participants earned a median hourly wage of \$11.71 compared to \$8.00 before entering college and \$7.50 for other welfare leavers. Additionally, successful participants reported having greater benefit packages than other welfare leavers.

Summary of Bill: The Higher Education for Lifelong Progress Program (HELP) is created. To the extent that funds are specifically appropriated, up to a maximum enrollment of 600, qualified welfare recipients may attend up to two years of undergraduate education or training as their required TANF work activity. Because participation in HELP satisfies the countable work activity, additional work requirements are not imposed on participants.

To qualify for HELP, applicants must pursue a higher education degree in Washington in a program that results in employment in a field designated by the State Board for Technical and Community Colleges as high wage/high demand. Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) administrators advise HELP participants to obtain specific career planning and advising service from their educational institution. TANF clients who have already completed some post-secondary education are given priority in selection for the HELP program.

DSHS must contract with the Washington Institute for Public Policy to perform a study of HELP to track degree completion, wage progression, and welfare recidivism. The report must identify barriers and enhancements to the program's success and quantify the expected increase in lifetime earnings of program graduates.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 17, 2003.

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