

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5864

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Higher Education, March 3, 2003

Title: An act relating to promise scholarship eligibility.

Brief Description: Allowing recipients of GED certificates to be eligible for promise scholarships.

Sponsors: Senators Shin, Carlson, McAuliffe, Schmidt, Keiser, Johnson, Kohl-Welles, Stevens, Mulliken, Regala, Thibaudeau, Jacobsen, Parlette, Rasmussen and B. Sheldon.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education: 2/27/03, 3/3/03 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Carlson, Chair; Schmidt, Vice Chair; Horn, Kohl-Welles, Mulliken, B. Sheldon and Shin.

Staff: Dario de la Rosa (786-7484)

Background: The Washington State Promise Scholarship program was established to encourage excellent academic performance and to reward low- and middle-income students who demonstrate meritorious achievement in high school by providing them a two-year scholarship. Eligible students receive the scholarship by ranking in the top 15 percent of their graduating class or attaining a minimum required score on either the SAT or ACT exam. Family income may not exceed 135 percent of the state's median family income.

The Higher Education Coordinating Board's (HECB) December 2002 report concluded that the Promise Scholarship program effectively responds to its statutory goal of providing scholarships to meritorious low- and middle- income high school graduates. The HECB study also concluded that for the program to influence student behavior the scholarship must be available when they graduate high school.

Summary of Bill: Not only high school graduates, but GED holders 21 years of age or younger may qualify for the Promise Scholarship by equaling or exceeding a cumulative Scholastic Aptitude Test score of 1200 on the first attempt, or equaling or exceeding a composite American College Test score of 27 on the first attempt.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: This bill benefits those students who leave school at a young age but decide to attain a GED and attempt higher education. Many factors in a young person's life cause him or her to leave school, but students who get a GED and meet the qualifications should receive the Promise Scholarship. Because students who earn a GED still have to meet the SAT and ACT testing requirements of other students, no student is granted a special benefit. Concerns: Although the concept of this bill is good, since the funding for the Promise Scholarship is a fixed amount, allowing a new class of eligible students might dilute the total award granted to each student.

Testimony Against: In order for a student to be eligible to take the GED test, he or she must be a high school drop-out. The GED is not the equivalent to a high school diploma. Students who could ordinarily get a high school diploma and earn a promise scholarship may drop out of school and use this exemption as a backdoor to higher education.

Testified: Senator Paull Shin, prime sponsor (pro); Larry Davis, State Board of Education (pro); Bruce Botka, Higher Education Coordinating Board (pro); Armando Munguia, Washington Student Lobby (pro); Brian Jeffries, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (con).