

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## SSB 6790

---

**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Human Services

**Title:** An act relating to creating a pilot program for the education of inmates.

**Brief Description:** Creating a pilot program for the postsecondary education of inmates.

**Sponsors:** Senate Committee on Human Services & Corrections (originally sponsored by Senators Hargrove, Stevens, Regala, Shin, Kline and Kohl-Welles).

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Human Services: 2/25/08, 2/26/08 [DP].

**Brief Summary of Substitute Bill**

- Directs the Department of Corrections to establish a pilot program for the purpose of assessing the impact of inmate participation in two-year, post-secondary education programs.
- Directs the Washington State Institute for Public Policy to evaluate the post-secondary pilot program.

---

### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Dickerson, Chair; Roberts, Vice Chair; Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Darneille, McCoy and O'Brien.

**Minority Report:** Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Ahern, Ranking Minority Member; Bailey.

**Staff:** Brian Considine (786-7290).

**Background:**

The Joint Legislative Task Force on Offenders Programs, Sentencing and Supervision (Task Force) submitted a report in 2006 that made recommendations to the Legislature and the

---

*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.*

Governor on reforms to programs offered in prisons and in the community, as well as reforms to sentencing and supervision of offenders returning to the community in order to enhance public safety, lower recidivism, and reduce crime and victimization.

One of the recommendations from the Task Force was that the Legislature should eliminate barriers to offender participation in vocational training and post-secondary education and increase the availability of education and vocational training when the programming is linked to an offender's individual reentry plan.

In 2007 the Legislature passed ESSB 6157 that required the Department of Corrections (DOC) to develop an individual reentry plan for every offender committed to its jurisdiction. An individual reentry plan is designed to address both the risks and the needs of the offender, and includes an assessment of the offender's current educational skill level and future need for education or vocational training.

The DOC will provide basic academic skills to offenders in obtaining a high school diploma or its equivalent; vocational training necessary to participate in a work program or obtain work upon release; and additional work and education programs necessary for compliance with an offender's individual reentry plan (except post-secondary education).

Other appropriate vocational, work, or education programming that does not meet the above requirements must be paid for by the inmate according to a sliding scale formula or may be paid by a third party. These payments are not subject to mandatory deductions.

To the extent that funding is provided, the Legislature also created a post-secondary education degree program within the DOC. An inmate must either pay for the program or have it funded through a third party. The DOC is authorized to accept any grants or donations to provide post-secondary education to inmates.

---

### **Summary of Bill:**

The DOC is directed to establish a pilot program for the purpose of assessing the impact of inmate participation in two-year post-secondary education degree programs. The DOC must select two sites for operation of the program, giving priority to those institutions that have had recent contracts with accredited community colleges to provide post-secondary educational services.

The educational programs must:

- be an Associate of Arts degree program or be intended to provide the first two years of the equivalent of a Baccalaureate degree program;
- give priority to community colleges that have demonstrated the potential to contribute nonstate resources to the pilot program, such as volunteer staff;
- select inmates who are a representative sampling within its institutions;
- give priority to inmates whose individual reentry plan includes post-secondary education degree program participation; and

- give priority to inmates who have between two and four years of their term of incarceration left at the commencement of the program. Inmates may not be required to pay for participation.

The DOC may accept donations and grants to operate the program. The pilot program must begin by March 1, 2009, and extend for four fiscal years, ending June 30, 2012.

The Washington State Institute for Public Policy must evaluate the pilot program to determine whether it:

- is cost effective;
- results in better employment and income outcomes for participating inmates;
- affects maintenance of stable housing in the community; and
- impacts recidivism.

A preliminary report is due to the Governor and the Legislature by December 1, 2015, with the final report due September 30, 2018.

A null and void clause is included, making the bill null and void unless funded in the budget.

---

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed. However, the bill is null and void if not funded in the budget.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) A professor at the Grays Harbor Community College, Dr. Brewster, did a study that showed getting a General Education Development certificate (GED) increased recidivism, but anything beyond a GED lowers recidivism. This bill uses a mix of state money and voluntary resources in a pilot program to help the state measure recidivism rates in order for the Legislature to have an answer about the effectiveness of post-secondary education. The state money is needed as a catalyst to get the program up and running, but the program will also rely on donations and volunteers. The mix of resources is needed to get a real, valid statistical sample, and 450 inmates are needed for a good sampling to use for the study. Volunteers are professors teaching towards a two-year degree. There is also a possibility of receiving some grant money for the program. This should be seen as a benefit for victims and taxpayers, and there should be money in the Senate budget for the program. Post-secondary education is the single most effective means in reducing recidivism. This program begins to correct the error of taking these programs out of the prisons, and offenders are eager to take college classes because they understand post-secondary degree is good for them.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Senator Hargrove, prime sponsor; and Carol Estes, Friends Committee on Washington Public Policy.

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