

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5322

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Higher Education, February 5, 2007

Title: An act relating to identifying sites and programs for a four-year institution of higher education serving the Snohomish-Island-Skagit county region.

Brief Description: Identifying sites and programs for a new institution of higher education in the Snohomish-Island-Skagit county region.

Sponsors: Senators Berkey, Shin, Haugen, Schoesler, Hobbs, Kilmer and Marr.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education: 2/01/07, 2/5/07 [DP-WM].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

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

Signed by Senators Shin, Chair; Kilmer, Vice Chair; Delvin, Ranking Minority Member; Berkey, Schoesler and Sheldon.

Staff: Aldo Melchiori (786-7439)

Background: There have been a number of studies undertaken to determine the higher education needs of north King, Snohomish, Island, and Skagit counties, dating as far back as 1988. In November 2006, the final report from a consultant team was transmitted to the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB). The consultant team found that the needs of 10,767 full-time equivalent students in the area would be unmet by 2025 without state action. It was additionally found that the existing institutions of higher education that serve the area have no idle expansion capacity to serve the forecasted need. The team found that investment in programs with a polytechnic focus was warranted. The team recommended investment in a four-year university with a polytechnic focus located between north Everett and Marysville, continued investment of the University of Washington's Bothell Campus, and continued investment in the area's community colleges. The next steps, identified by the team, were continued efforts to define the organizational structure and siting of a new resource to meet the needs of the area, as well as efforts to define and describe incremental development of the region's community colleges and learning centers.

In December 2006, after receiving the consultant team's final report, the HECB published its assessment of the higher education needs of the Snohomish, Island, and Skagit (SIS) Counties. The HECB concluded that core funding must be provided to build the programmatic and physical capacity of institutions in which the state has already invested, but also that it is

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appropriate to consider and begin initial planning for creation of a four-year campus in the future.

Summary of Bill: The Office of Financial Management (OFM) must assess options and make a recommendation on alternative sites and secure purchase options for an institution of higher education in the SIS County region. Possible sites will be identified using the following criteria: (1) meeting the unmet baccalaureate needs in the region; (2) accessibility from existing and planned transportation infrastructure; (3) availability of land in Everett, Marysville, and the north Snohomish County; (4) whether the parcel size allows flexibility for future growth; (5) costs of land acquisition; (6) whether the land is impacted by environmental hazards; and (7) meeting the objectives of the master business plan.

The OFM must develop specific operational and management plans needed to establish a institution offering comprehensive, four-year programs with a polytechnical focus that addresses regional demographic pressures and workforce needs. The OFM must coordinate with the local community.

The OFM must contract with an outside neutral consultant for this effort. Recommendations are reported to the Governor and the appropriate committees of the Senate and the House of Representatives by December 1, 2007.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 23, 2007.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The cost differences between the identified options are negligible, but the benefits to the students and the region are best served by a four year polytechnical college. We need locally educated students that are able to compete in the global marketplace. This proposal focuses on building for the future of the region. A neutral consultant is important to bring an objective focus to the issue. Business leaders in the region are clamoring for qualified employees. Our state economy is being slowed because Washington businesses can't find enough qualified employees. This region has the fastest growing job market in the state and these are jobs that pay family wages. This college would help our residents compete for jobs regionally and nationally.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Berkey, prime sponsor; Mayor Ray Stephanson, City of Everett; Sue Ambler, Snohomish County Workforce Development; Louis Stanton-Masten, Everett Area Chamber of Commerce; Mayor Dianne White, City of Stanwood; Sharon Dillon, Skagit County; Aaron Reardon, Snohomish County.