

HOUSE BILL REPORT

E2SHB 2630

As Passed House:
February 28, 2010

Title: An act relating to creating the opportunity express program.

Brief Description: Creating the opportunity express program.

Sponsors: House Committee on Education Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Probst, Kenney, Conway, Maxwell, Jacks, White, Simpson, Seaquist, Sells, Goodman, Ormsby and Santos).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 1/15/10, 1/20/10 [DPS];

Education Appropriations: 2/2/10, 2/4/10 [DP2S(w/o sub HE)].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/28/10, 92-2.

Brief Summary of Engrossed Second Substitute Bill

- Requires that colleges give priority in the use of Worker Retraining funds to programs in aerospace, health care, long-term care, advanced manufacturing, construction, renewable energy industries, and high-demand occupations in strategic industry clusters as identified by the state and local comprehensive workforce development plans developed by the Workforce Education and Training Coordinating Board and the local Workforce Development Councils.
- Encourages the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges to develop a single website for the purpose of advertising the availability of funding for the Worker Retraining, Opportunity Grant, Opportunity Internship programs, training programs approved by the commissioner of the Employment Security Department, training programs prioritized by industry, and training programs administered by labor and management partnerships.
- Creates the Opportunity Express Account and stipulates that funding may be used for certain training programs and administrative costs up to \$88,844,000.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

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.

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Wallace, Chair; Sells, Vice Chair; Anderson, Ranking Minority Member; Schmick, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Angel, Carlyle, Driscoll, Haler, Hasegawa and White.

Staff: Andi Smith (786-7304).

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The second substitute bill be substituted therefor and the second substitute bill do pass and do not pass the substitute bill by Committee on Higher Education. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Haigh, Chair; Probst, Vice Chair; Anderson, Carlyle, Hunter, Kagi, Maxwell, Quall, Rolfes and Wallace.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Priest, Ranking Minority Member; Hope, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Haler and Nealey.

Staff: Serah Stetson (786-7109).

Background:

Worker Retraining Program.

The Worker Retraining Program (WRP) provides funding to dislocated and unemployed workers for training programs and related support services including financial aid, career advising, educational planning, referral to training resources, job referral, and job development. The WRP includes a grant of financial aid to students that can be used to help pay for tuition, books, fees, and related expenses. To qualify, a person must be eligible for or have exhausted his or her unemployment compensation benefits within the last 24 months. Dislocated workers and long-term unemployed people have priority access to training and support services. Displaced homemakers, those formerly self-employed, and unemployed veterans recently separated from service may also qualify. Vulnerable workers (those who are employed but in declining occupations and have less than one year of college education plus a credential) may qualify depending upon the economic status of the local community.

The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) administers the WRP program and requires each college to convene a Worker Retraining advisory committee (committee). The committee must include involvement from business and labor and is required to help colleges link students to high-wage, high-employer demand programs suited to local needs. Each college is also required to submit an annual plan that lays out how WRP program funds will be used and how WRP programs are linked to the overall economic development strategy of the region. Each college may contract with private career colleges to provide WRP program capacity.

During the most recent economic recession, demand for the WRP has greatly expanded. Compared to the same academic quarter in the prior year, Worker Retraining enrollments grew 26 percent in fall quarter 2008, 39 percent in winter quarter 2008, and 50 percent in spring quarter 2009. Worker Retraining enrollments are driven in large part by

unemployment rates. At the start of the 2008-09 academic year the state's unemployment rate was 5.41 percent. Unemployment grew steadily throughout the year and it now stands at just over 9 percent. Unemployment is expected to continue to increase through spring 2010, topping out at almost 10 percent. Last year the program served 8,900 full-time equivalent students (FTES).

Opportunity Grant Program.

The SBCTC administers the Opportunity Grant (OPP) program that is designed to assist low-income students enroll in college for training in high-wage, high-demand career pathways. These pathways are to provide a minimum beginning wage of \$13 per hour in Washington (\$15 per hour in King County). Eligible students pursuing approved career pathways at any of the 34 Washington community and technical colleges or eight approved private career colleges may receive funds for tuition and fees for up to 45 credits and up to an additional \$1,000 for books, supplies, or tools. To qualify, a person must make a formal application to the OPP program, be a Washington resident student, enroll in an Opportunity Grant-eligible program of study, have family income that is at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level using the most current guidelines available, and have financial need based on federal methodology from the Free Application for Federal Student Aid.

In 2006 the Legislature appropriated \$4 million to kick off an Opportunity Grant pilot project at 10 community and technical colleges. The 10 pilot OPP programs showed excellent results with 73 percent retention and approximately 843 low-income students participating in training for high-wage, high-demand career pathways. In 2007 the Legislature expanded the Opportunity Grant program by \$7.5 million for a total of \$11.5 million per year for all 34 community and technical colleges. In 2007-08 the Opportunity Grant program served over 2,000 FTES or approximately 3,000 full-time and part-time students. Again, student persistence exceeded expectations with an 81 percent fall to spring retention rate. By 2008 the OPP program had grown to serve almost 5,000 full- and part-time students equivalent to 3,305 FTES.

Opportunity Internships.

Created in 2009, the Opportunity Internship program (program) provides incentives for local consortia to build educational and employment pipelines for low income high school students in high-demand occupations in targeted industries. The program is administered by the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (WTECB) and offers outreach, internships, pre-apprenticeships, counseling, and up to one year of financial aid through the State Need Grant, as well as the promise of a job interview if the student completes a postsecondary program of study.

Under the program, consortia, composed of the area Workforce Development Councils (WDC), Economic Development Council, high schools, community or technical colleges, public and private four-year institutions of higher education, apprenticeship councils, private vocational schools, employers, and labor organizations use existing federal, state, and private resources to:

- identify high-demand occupations in targeted industries for which internships and pre-apprenticeships will be developed and provided for low income students;

- develop paid or unpaid internships and pre-apprenticeships of at least 90 hours in length; and
- provide mentoring, guidance, and assistance with college applications and financial aid.

Summary of Engrossed Second Substitute Bill:

In administering the WRP, community and technical colleges must give priority to programs that train students in aerospace, healthcare, advanced manufacturing, construction, or renewable energy. The colleges may also prioritize additional programs of study if those programs are linked to high-demand industries identified in the state comprehensive plan for workforce development by the WTECB, as well as in local workforce development plans developed by area WDC. Additional industries and occupations identified by the area WDC can also be prioritized.

The SBCTC is encouraged to create a single website to advertise the availability of workforce education and training resources. The website must explain that the Opportunity Express program helps people who want to pursue college and apprenticeships for certain targeted industries within the following tracks: (1) Worker Retraining for unemployed adults; (2) training programs approved by the Commissioner of the Employment Security Department, training programs administered by labor and management partnerships, and training programs prioritized by industry for unemployed adults and incumbent workers; (3) the Opportunity Grant program for low-income adults; and (4) the Opportunity Internship program for low-income high school students. The website may also include a link to the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries apprenticeship program. If the SBCTC opts to create the website, it must be completed by July 1, 2010.

The Opportunity Express Account (Account) is created and stipulates money in the Account may only be used for the worker retraining program, training programs approved by the Commissioner of the Employment Security Department, training programs administered by labor and management partnerships, industry-prioritized programs, training programs that facilitate career progression in healthcare occupations -- including long-term care, the Opportunity Internship program, and the Opportunity Grant program. Funding may also be used for administrative costs related to these programs and the collection of voluntary contributions into the Account. Funding appropriated from the Account may only supplement, not supplant, existing funding for the Opportunity Grant program.

The Opportunity Internship program is expanded during Fiscal Years 2011-2013 to include no more than 12 participating consortia. Existing law limits the Opportunity Internship program to 10 consortia and the number of students who can participate per consortia to 100. The existing limitation creates a statewide cap of 1,000 students per year. This limit is expanded to 5,000 students per year, with no per consortia limit on the number of students served. The WTECB is directed to assure a geographic distribution of consortia in regions across the state.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Higher Education):

(In support) The genesis of this bill is straightforward: there are tens of thousands of people unemployed, especially in Clark County, and they can either spend this time idle or they can get into training and increase their skills. Training would increase their chance at self-sufficiency as well as the competitive advantage for our state. Conversations with stakeholders indicated that the three programs that are part of this bill are the best and most straightforward options for getting people into training, but a key issue right now is capacity. We need a model that allows colleges to hire more faculty and add sections to accommodate greater demand. We also have a need to make sure people know about the availability of training resources and so the programs were packaged together as an advertising tactic. It is also critically important that we provide additional funding to the programs and as such, the bill creates a "catcher's mitt" to receive any federal funding that might come to the state. We need to be ready to use those resources when they come and this structure gives the state the ability to do that.

The proposed substitute bill retains its focus on high-demand jobs, which is of critical importance. It also reduces the complexity in the access and eligibility process and allows for not only continuation but growth of highly successful programs. It is concerning that the proposed substitute bill takes out language about mandatory coordination between the colleges and area WDC, as we want to assure a focus on meeting local demand. Though it is not currently a provision in this bill, the Association of Washington Business also cautions against the use of Unemployment Insurance for these types of training programs.

The changes in the substitute bill provide greater flexibility and make the bill more workable. In the WTECB's assessment of the WRP, we have found the program produces excellent results in earnings and employment rates and has proven a great investment for the state. It is important for the program to retain flexibility in local groups defining high demand so as to accommodate providing training for jobs available in the local economy. Students are in support of the bill with the proposed amendments. The streamlined marketing is great for students. There are some remaining concerns about stipulating only certain industries as priorities, since funneling students into selected programs reduces student choice. We would like to see the final bill retain flexibility for students.

There are some language changes that may be necessary to illustrate that apprenticeship is college. Changes should also include mention of pre-apprenticeship to help put students on that path. A reference to the state apprenticeship program should also be included on the "one-stop-shop" website. Concerns remain about removing the mandate for partnering at the local level as well as the reporting and accountability requirements.

This bill will increase access to higher education for low-income and moderate-income people. The outcome data for these programs, especially the Opportunity Grant program, is incredible especially considering the very disadvantaged populations the program serves. Completion rates are terrific and this program will go a long way in helping people in need. Right now the WRP is significantly oversubscribed and the SBCTC supports resources being provided. There is still some work to do with the proposed substitute to assure that schools

retain the necessary flexibility to meet local student and employer demand. The mandated collaboration is not necessary, as the program really does this already. Given high levels of student demand, the programs should also not be made overly administratively burdensome. The stimulus money has not come quickly and we don't want to see the same thing happen with this program. The long-standing success of the program should speak for itself, partnerships between colleges and area WDC have been a part of the program from its inception and we should not change components unnecessarily.

Students who need to get back on track have found tremendous opportunity at the New Market Skill Center and the pre-apprenticeships offered there. If you cannot find a job, or if you need a second chance to make better choices, the programs supported by the New Market Skill Center and by Opportunity Grants provide the support we need to put together our futures.

(Opposed) None.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Education Appropriations):

(In support) This bill is the right thing to do although it's not an easy thing to do. The underlying bill takes three proven programs with a solid track record that do similar things for similar populations and coordinates them a little more and makes the intake a little easier for interested participants. The proposed second substitute bill adds the funding source. It's entirely up to each employer whether they want to contribute and if they do they get a credit on their unemployment taxes. This could be helpful to employers during a time when unemployment taxes are high. The tax credit is capped at \$98 million because other legislation is currently looking at changes that would result in the receipt of an additional \$98 million into the unemployment insurance system from the federal government. Usually these funds would go into administration, but because of the economic crisis, if there is a way to prioritize these funds towards training 22,000 people in high-demand careers, it's the right thing to do. This would be about a 20 percent increase in the total number of people in workforce training across the state. This is to help people that are down on their luck, can't find a job, and can't find the classes that they need to get back to school. This focuses on high-demand fields to prepare our economy to be more competitive.

The community and technical colleges (CTC) are currently seeing dislocated workers in unprecedented numbers. The Legislature currently provides funding for 6,200 full-time equivalent students (FTEs). The funding per FTE for this program has remained constant while tuition and fees have more than doubled. Current funding is insufficient. Enrollments this fall were up 70 percent year to year. The CTC's served over 9,000 FTEs in this program. The Governor's proposed budget adds funding for an additional 2,500 FTEs, but this is woefully inadequate for the amount of demand. The results speak for themselves. Job placement is over 80 percent coming out of the worker retraining program and there is 87 percent wage recovery for high-wage workers who are laid off and 118 percent recovery for those who are laid off out of low-income jobs. Over 25 percent of worker retraining enrollments are in business, 25 percent are in health care, 12 percent are in information technology, and the remainder across the board. Any and all resources, including this, can help to serve this demand.

There are over 40,000 workers in the aerospace industry. Right now, with the downturn, this bill would help the state prepare to grow this industry in the future. Because of the aging workforce, there will be a loss of 5,000 to 6,000 workers in this industry with high competition from other states. This bill would be advantageous and stabilizing to the aerospace industry.

This is an innovative and out-of-the-box way to approach worker retraining that does not divert funds that would otherwise be used for unemployment benefits. This is funded appropriately and would be helpful and necessary. It addresses needs in the post-secondary system and in rural areas that are economically depressed. It also addresses the double crisis in health care in terms of unemployment and the loss for many of health care benefits. The pressures in the system are really heavy and there is a shortage of workers and the career ladder is frozen. A workforce that wants to be trained into healthcare positions combined with this bill creates that opportunity and helps to immediately address the need in this industry. Nationally, it looks like there is a need for about one million people to fill some of the top long-term care and general health care jobs, and right now they are not jobs that people would want to get into. This bill is really exciting and is an opportunity to expand on the good work that has been done.

The best time to train workers is during a recession, so now is the best time. The Opportunity Grant program is unbelievably successful and has exceeded everyone's expectations. Anytime that there is the opportunity to get this kind of money outside of the General Fund-State for this kind of purpose, there is a need to overcome any challenges or technical problems with this bill to move forward.

(In support with concerns) Subsidization of workers in high-demand career fields has value. However, the passage of this bill would impact the viability and accuracy of several other bills before the Legislature this session that are based on the Unemployment Trust Fund (Fund) being whole. There would also be an impact from the increase of unemployment taxes that could affect the ability of employers to provide jobs and wages in industries already experiencing high unemployment.

(Opposed) There is no concern with the underlying bill, or the bill that was passed out of the Higher Education Committee. Unfortunately, the funding mechanism is an issue. This bill as written is a diversion of funds from the Fund. This would take \$98 million from the Fund and move it to another account. That would result in less money in the Fund, which in the out-years would cause a decline in the size of the Fund and an increase in unemployment taxes. This bill mixed with other bills before the Legislature could potentially address this program, but this bill in isolation would result in taxes going up.

In terms of administration, the capacity and ability of the ESD to implement this bill does not exist. This bill makes significant changes to the processes that employers use to pay their unemployment insurance taxes starting April 1, 2010. The system that the ESD uses to collect taxes has 14 different data bases and employers have five different ways that they can currently pay these taxes. This would take a significant amount of time to implement, although it's unclear what the cost or timeframe would be. Additionally, this bill could result in money owed to the federal government for the use of their system which would have to be negotiated. All of the costs associated with implementation of this program would have to be

done with state dollars. There is also a possibility that the mechanism as drafted would be out of conformity with federal law. This would put the state at risk for hundreds of millions of tax dollars that employers receive.

Persons Testifying (Higher Education): (In support) Representative Probst, prime sponsor; Dave Johnson, Washington State Building Construction and Trades Council; Amber Carter, Association of Washington Business; Maddy Thompson, Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board; Marcus Sweetser, Washington Student Association; Tony Lee, Solid Ground - Statewide Poverty Action Network; Jim Crabbe, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Jack Birmingham, Highline Community College; Gena Wikstrom, Northwest Career Colleges Federation; and Laurie Shannon, Amber Nicholas, Winter Lawson, and Daniel Villanueva, New Market Skills Center.

Persons Testifying (Education Appropriations): (In support) Representative Probst, prime sponsor; Jim Crabbe, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Linda Lahan, Aerospace Futures Alliance; Trent House, Boeing Corporation; Bob Guenther, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers; Tom Lopp, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; Sam Shaddox, Washington Student Association; Ellie Menzies, Service Employees International Union 1999 Northwest; Tony Lee, Solid Ground; and Misha Werschkul, Service Employees International Union 775 Northwest.

(In support with concerns) Dave Johnson, Washington State Building and Construction Trades Council.

(Opposed) Joel Sacks, Employment Security Department.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Higher Education): None.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Education Appropriations): None.