

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 1129

As of March 21, 2017

Title: An act relating to providing associate degree education to enhance education opportunities and public safety.

Brief Description: Providing associate degree education to enhance education opportunities and public safety.

Sponsors: House Committee on Higher Education (originally sponsored by Representatives Haler and Pollet; by request of State Board for Community and Technical Colleges).

Brief History: Passed House: 3/01/17, 77-21.

Committee Activity: Law & Justice: 3/21/17.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Authorizes the Department of Corrections to implement associate degree education programs at state correctional institutions to provide inmates with an associate degree.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON LAW & JUSTICE

Staff: Shani Bauer (786-7468)

Background: Under current law, the Department of Corrections (DOC) is required, to the extent possible and considering all available funds, to prioritize its resources to meet educational goals for inmates in the following order: (1) achievement of basic academic skills through obtaining a high school diploma or its equivalent certificate; (2) achievement of vocational skills necessary for purposes of work programs and for an inmate to qualify for work upon release; (3) additional work and education programs necessary for compliance with an offender's individual re-entry plan; and (4) any other appropriate vocational, work, or education programs that are not necessary for compliance with an offender's individual re-entry plan.

DOC has historically been prohibited from paying for postsecondary education. Any inmate expressing interest in postsecondary courses was required to self-pay for the costs of a postsecondary education degree program or pay by receiving funding from a third party. 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.

Legislature authorized inmates to participate in a state-funded postsecondary education degree program during the 2015-2017 fiscal biennium based on the following conditions:

- priority should be given to inmates within five years of release;
- the inmate does not already have a postsecondary degree;
- the inmate's individual re-entry plan includes participation in a postsecondary education degree program that is offered at the inmate's state correctional institutions and approved by DOC.

DOC contracts with community colleges to provide basic education and job training at each of the state's 12 adult prisons. According to the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, the average Washington offender scores at an eighth-grade level or lower in basic literacy skills such as reading and math. Sixty percent are unemployed and seventy-five percent lack job skills and vocational training.

In 2014–15, there were 9194 offenders who participated in community college programs in Washington. These students earned:

- 240 GED certificates;
- 2043 vocational certificates; and
- 36 associate degrees—no state funding was used.

Community colleges offer a variety of associate degrees. Some degrees are specifically targeted to prepare a person for employment in a particular segment of the workforce. These degrees may have a variety of designations, including an associate of applied science, associate of technology, or associate of technical arts.

A 2015 update by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy found that for every dollar invested in correctional education programs, \$18.40 is saved from fewer crimes and incarcerations. The studies are not specific enough to separate out the effect on recidivism and cost effectiveness of postsecondary education on its own.

Summary of Bill: The college board may authorize any board of trustees to promote and conduct associate degree education and training of incarcerated adults through new or expanded partnerships between the community and technical colleges and DOC.

DOC is authorized to implement associate degree education programs at state correctional institutions to provide inmates with an associate degree. DOC may include in the program any associate degree education program from an accredited community or technical college, college, or university that is part of an associate degree program.

Inmates must be selected to participate in the program based on priority criteria and the following conditions:

- priority should be given to inmates within five years of release;
- the inmate does not already have a postsecondary degree; and
- the inmate's individual re-entry plan includes participation in an associate degree program that is offered at the inmate's state correctional institution, approved by DOC.

Inmates not meeting the priority criteria must be required to pay the costs for participation in a postsecondary education degree program. Inmates sentenced to life without the possibility of release, or sentenced to death, may not participate in the state-funded associate degree education program.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This concept started out a few years ago with a four year degree and has now been reduced to an associate degree. The majority of inmates who have received a degree while in prison have gone on to become productive members of society. This is a good bill and we are pleased it is moving forward. There is no objection to the Senate amendments.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Larry Haler, Prime Sponsor; Arlen Harris, WA State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: PRO: Mike Paris, Department of Corrections.