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**SUBSTITUTE HOUSE BILL 2171**

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**State of Washington 68th Legislature 2024 Regular Session**

**By** House Postsecondary Education & Workforce (originally sponsored by Representatives Leavitt, Waters, Slatter, Simmons, Reed, Ramel, Doglio, Reeves, and Davis)

AN ACT Relating to financial aid grants for incarcerated students; and amending RCW 72.09.460 and 72.09.467.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

**Sec.**  RCW 72.09.460 and 2021 c 200 s 4 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) Recognizing that there is a positive correlation between education opportunities and reduced recidivism, it is the intent of the legislature to offer appropriate postsecondary degree or certificate opportunities to incarcerated individuals.

(2) The legislature intends that all incarcerated individuals be required to participate in department-approved education programs, work programs, or both, unless exempted as specifically provided in this section. Eligible incarcerated individuals who refuse to participate in available education or work programs available at no charge to the incarcerated individuals shall lose privileges according to the system established under RCW 72.09.130. Eligible incarcerated individuals who are required to contribute financially to an education or work program and refuse to contribute shall be placed in another work program. Refusal to contribute shall not result in a loss of privileges.

(3) The legislature recognizes more incarcerated individuals may agree to participate in education and work programs than are available. The department must make every effort to achieve maximum public benefit by placing incarcerated individuals in available and appropriate education and work programs.

(4)(a) The department shall, to the extent possible and considering all available funds, prioritize its resources to meet the following goals for incarcerated individuals in the order listed:

(i) Achievement of basic academic skills through obtaining a high school diploma or a high school equivalency certificate as provided in RCW 28B.50.536, including achievement by those incarcerated individuals eligible for special education services pursuant to state or federal law;

(ii) Achievement of vocational skills necessary for purposes of work programs and for an incarcerated individual to qualify for work upon release;

(iii) Additional work and education programs necessary for compliance with an incarcerated individual's individual reentry plan under RCW 72.09.270, including special education services and postsecondary degree or certificate education programs; and

(iv) Other appropriate vocational, work, or education programs that are not necessary for compliance with an incarcerated individual's individual reentry plan under RCW 72.09.270 including postsecondary degree or certificate education programs.

(b) If programming is provided pursuant to (a)((~~(i) through~~)) (ii) and (iii) of this subsection that is eligible for financial aid, the department may require an incarcerated individual to apply for, but not utilize, federal and state financial aid grants for use in such programming. At the incarcerated individual's option, the incarcerated individual may utilize federal and state financial aid grants for the cost of attendance for eligible programming provided pursuant to (a)(ii) and (iii) of this subsection. An incarcerated individual may receive education grants, scholarships, or third-party funding to cover the cost of attendance. An incarcerated individual may receive department-approved donated educational materials funded by grants and donations and supplied by education providers or third parties. If the cost of attendance exceeds eligibility for grants, or the incarcerated individual is not eligible for financial aid or chooses not to apply for or utilize financial aid, or if financial aid is not available, the department shall pay the cost of such programming where possible and not otherwise covered by third-party funding, including but not limited to books, materials, and supplies.

(c)(i) If programming is provided pursuant to (a)(iv) of this subsection, incarcerated individuals shall be required to pay all or a portion of the costs, including books, fees, and tuition, for participation in any vocational, work, or education program as provided in department policies. If programming provided pursuant to (a)(iv) of this subsection is eligible for financial aid, the department may require an incarcerated individual to apply for, but not utilize, federal and state financial aid grants for use in such programming. At the incarcerated individual's option, the incarcerated individual may utilize federal and state financial aid grants for the cost of attendance for eligible programming provided pursuant to (a)(iv) of this subsection. An incarcerated individual may receive education grants, scholarships, or third-party funding to cover the cost of attendance. An incarcerated individual may receive department-approved donated educational materials funded by grants and donations and supplied by education providers or third parties. Department policies shall include a postaward formula for determining how much an incarcerated individual shall be required to pay after deducting any amount from utilized financial aid or third-party funding. The postaward formula shall include steps which correlate to an incarcerated individual's average monthly income or average available balance in a personal savings account and which are correlated to a prorated portion or percent of the per credit fee for tuition, books, or other ancillary educational costs. The postaward formula shall be reviewed every two years. A third party, including but not limited to nonprofit entities or community-based postsecondary education programs, may pay directly to the department all or a portion of costs and tuition for any programming provided pursuant to (a)(iv) of this subsection on behalf of an incarcerated individual. Such payments shall not be subject to any of the deductions as provided in this chapter.

(ii) For the purposes of this subsection, postaward formula offsets and funds paid by the department for educational programming shall not result in the reduction of any "gift aid," as defined in RCW 28B.145.010.

(d) The department may accept any and all donations and grants of money, equipment, supplies, materials, and services from any third party, including but not limited to nonprofit entities and community-based postsecondary education programs, and may receive, utilize, and dispose of same to complete the purposes of this section.

(e) Any funds collected by the department under (c) and (d) of this subsection and subsections (11) and (12) of this section shall be used solely for the creation, maintenance, or expansion of incarcerated individual educational and vocational programs.

(5) The department shall provide access to a program of education to all incarcerated individuals who are under the age of eighteen and who have not met high school graduation requirements or requirements to earn a high school equivalency certificate as provided in RCW 28B.50.536 in accordance with chapter 28A.193 RCW. The program of education established by the department and education provider under RCW 28A.193.020 for incarcerated individuals under the age of eighteen must provide each incarcerated individual a choice of curriculum that will assist the incarcerated individual in achieving a high school diploma or high school equivalency certificate. The program of education may include but not be limited to basic education, prevocational training, work ethic skills, conflict resolution counseling, substance abuse intervention, and anger management counseling. The curriculum may balance these and other rehabilitation, work, and training components.

(6)(a) In addition to the policies set forth in this section, the department shall consider the following factors in establishing criteria for assessing the inclusion of education and work programs in an incarcerated individual's individual reentry plan and in placing incarcerated individuals in education and work programs:

(i) An incarcerated individual's release date and custody level. An incarcerated individual shall not be precluded from participating in an education or work program solely on the basis of his or her release date, except that incarcerated individuals with a release date of more than one hundred twenty months in the future shall not comprise more than ten percent of incarcerated individuals participating in a new class I correctional industry not in existence on June 10, 2004;

(ii) An incarcerated individual's education history and basic academic skills;

(iii) An incarcerated individual's work history and vocational or work skills;

(iv) An incarcerated individual's economic circumstances, including but not limited to an incarcerated individual's family support obligations; and

(v) Where applicable, an incarcerated individual's prior performance in department-approved education or work programs;

(b) The department shall establish, and periodically review, incarcerated individual behavior standards and program outcomes for all education and work programs. Incarcerated individuals shall be notified of applicable behavior standards and program goals prior to placement in an education or work program and shall be removed from the education or work program if they consistently fail to meet the standards or outcomes.

(7) Eligible incarcerated individuals who refuse to participate in available education or work programs available at no charge to the incarcerated individuals shall lose privileges according to the system established under RCW 72.09.130. Eligible incarcerated individuals who are required to contribute financially to an education or work program and refuse to contribute shall be placed in another work program. Refusal to contribute shall not result in a loss of privileges.

(8) The department shall establish, by rule, a process for identifying and assessing incarcerated individuals with learning disabilities, traumatic brain injuries, and other cognitive impairments to determine whether the person requires accommodations in order to effectively participate in educational programming, including general educational development tests and postsecondary education. The department shall establish a process to provide such accommodations to eligible incarcerated individuals.

(9) The department shall establish, and periodically review, goals for expanding access to postsecondary degree and certificate education programs and program completion for all incarcerated individuals, including persons of color. The department may contract and partner with any accredited educational program sponsored by a nonprofit entity, community-based postsecondary education program, or institution with historical evidence of providing education programs to people of color.

(10) The department shall establish, by rule, objective medical standards to determine when an incarcerated individual is physically or mentally unable to participate in available education or work programs. When the department determines an incarcerated individual is permanently unable to participate in any available education or work program due to a health condition, the incarcerated individual is exempt from the requirement under subsection (2) of this section. When the department determines an incarcerated individual is temporarily unable to participate in an education or work program due to a medical condition, the incarcerated individual is exempt from the requirement of subsection (2) of this section for the period of time he or she is temporarily disabled. The department shall periodically review the medical condition of all incarcerated individuals with temporary disabilities to ensure the earliest possible entry or reentry by incarcerated individuals into available programming.

(11) The department shall establish policies requiring an incarcerated individual to pay all or a portion of the costs and tuition for any vocational training or postsecondary education program if the incarcerated individual previously abandoned coursework related to postsecondary degree or certificate education or vocational training without excuse as defined in rule by the department. Department policies shall include a formula for determining how much an incarcerated individual shall be required to pay. The formula shall include steps which correlate to an incarcerated individual's average monthly income or average available balance in a personal savings account and which are correlated to a prorated portion or percent of the per credit fee for tuition, books, or other ancillary costs. The formula shall be reviewed every two years. A third party may pay directly to the department all or a portion of costs and tuition for any program on behalf of an incarcerated individual under this subsection. Such payments shall not be subject to any of the deductions as provided in this chapter.

(12) Notwithstanding any other provision in this section, an incarcerated individual sentenced to death under chapter 10.95 RCW or subject to the provisions of 8 U.S.C. Sec. 1227:

(a) Shall not be required to participate in education programming except as may be necessary for the maintenance of discipline and security;

(b) May not participate in a postsecondary degree education program offered by the department or its contracted providers, unless the incarcerated individual's participation in the program is paid for by a third party or by the individual;

(c) May participate in prevocational or vocational training that may be necessary to participate in a work program;

(d) Shall be subject to the applicable provisions of this chapter relating to incarcerated individual financial responsibility for programming.

(13) If an incarcerated individual has participated in postsecondary education programs, the department shall provide the incarcerated individual with a copy of the incarcerated individual's unofficial transcripts, at no cost to the individual, upon the incarcerated individual's release or transfer to a different facility. Upon the incarcerated individual's completion of a postsecondary education program, the department shall provide to the incarcerated individual, at no cost to the individual, a copy of the incarcerated individual's unofficial transcripts. This requirement applies regardless of whether the incarcerated individual became ineligible to participate in or abandoned a postsecondary education program.

(14) For the purposes of this section, "third party" includes a nonprofit entity or community-based postsecondary education program that partners with the department to provide accredited postsecondary education degree and certificate programs at state correctional facilities.

**Sec.**  RCW 72.09.467 and 2021 c 200 s 8 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The department, the state board for community and technical colleges, the student achievement council, and the Washington statewide reentry council, in collaboration with an organization representing the presidents of the public four-year institutions of higher education, shall submit a combined report, pursuant to RCW 43.01.036, by December 1, 2021, and annually thereafter, to the appropriate committees of the legislature having oversight over higher education issues and correctional matters. The state agencies shall consult and engage with nonprofit and community-based postsecondary education providers during the development of the annual report.

(2) At a minimum, the combined report must include:

(a) The number of incarcerated individuals served in the department's postsecondary education system, the number of individuals not served, the number of individuals leaving the department's custody without a high school equivalency who were in the department's custody longer than one year, and the number of individuals released without any postsecondary education, each disaggregated by demographics;

(b) A complete list of postsecondary degree and certificate education programs offered at each state correctional facility, including enrollment rates and completion rates for each program;

(c) A review of the department's identification and assessment of incarcerated individuals with learning disabilities, traumatic brain injuries, and other cognitive impairments or disabilities that may limit their ability to participate in educational programming, including general educational development testing and postsecondary education. The report shall identify barriers to the identification and assessment of these individuals and include recommendations that will further facilitate access to educational programming for these individuals;

((~~(c)~~)) (d) An identification of issues related to ensuring that credits earned in credit-bearing courses are transferable. The report must also include the number of transferable credits awarded and the number of credits awarded that are not transferable;

((~~(d)~~)) (e) A review of policies on transfer, in order to create recommendations to institutions and the legislature that to ensure postsecondary education credits earned while incarcerated transfer seamlessly upon postrelease enrollment in a postsecondary education institution. The review must identify barriers or challenges on transferring credits experienced by individuals and the number of credits earned while incarcerated that transferred to the receiving colleges postrelease;

((~~(e)~~)) (f) The number of individuals participating in correspondence courses and completion rates of correspondence courses, disaggregated by demographics;

((~~(f)~~)) (g) An examination of the collaboration between correctional facilities, the educational programs, nonprofit and community-based postsecondary education providers, and the institutions, with the goal of ensuring that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, including the roles and responsibilities of each entity in relation to ensuring incarcerated individual access to, and accommodations in, educational programming; and

((~~(g)~~)) (h) A review of the partnerships with nonprofit and community-based postsecondary education organizations at state correctional facilities that provide accredited certificate and degree-granting programs and those that provide reentry services in support of educational programs and goals, including a list of the programs and services offered and recommendations to improve program delivery and access.

(3) The report shall strive to include, where possible, the voices and experiences of current or formerly incarcerated individuals.

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