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**HOUSE BILL 2360**

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

**By** Representatives Slatter, Gregerson, Morgan, Leavitt, Berry, Davis, Nance, Reed, Ramel, Simmons, Paul, Ormsby, and Pollet

AN ACT Relating to creating the Washington digital empowerment and workforce inclusion act; adding new sections to chapter 28C.18 RCW; and creating a new section.

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The legislature finds that without basic digital literacy and technological confidence, Washingtonians cannot access information technology or information technology-enabled jobs, or the education and training programs to prepare them for those jobs. As job functions or components of functions are digitized, these individuals fall increasingly further behind economically and socially.

The legislature finds that recent technological advancements, such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, cloud, and quantum computing have made the tools of digitization widely accessible and pervasive across all sectors with the ability to dramatically change the nature of work and the value of human capital in the marketplace. Workers must become adept at operating in an increasingly digitized world to perform at the highest levels of proficiency and productivity, and to influence and navigate employment and earnings potential.

Therefore, the legislature intends to establish the digital empowerment and workforce inclusion act to bring awareness to historically marginalized and underrepresented communities and to create opportunities to build confidence using technology, digital literacy education, and support for entry and professional growth in information technology-enabled careers.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  Subject to availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the Washington digital empowerment and workforce inclusion act is established to support historically marginalized people and communities in achieving meaningful and verifiable levels of digital literacy and to access and progress in information technology and information technology-enabled careers.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) Subject to availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the digital empowerment and workforce inclusion office is created within the board. The digital empowerment and workforce inclusion office shall:

(a) Administer funds for the advance equity in information technology careers mentorship program established in section 6 of this act and the reentry and targeted community workforce development program established in section 7 of this act;

(b) Support partners and contractors;

(c) Develop and maintain a performance accountability dashboard to track the state's progress in closing the disparities in technology-based employment;

(d) Develop an interactive navigation portal for jobseekers, workers, and students. The portal must:

(i) Be easily and regularly updated by industry and educational organizations;

(ii) Provide actionable information on knowledge, skills, and abilities required for high-demand information technology and information technology-enabled jobs;

(iii) Make information on relevant education and training programs for information technology and information technology-enabled jobs available, including on-the-job training and apprenticeship programs; and

(iv) Explain how education and training programs and credentials on the portal can link or stack towards higher level credentials and employment.

(2) The board shall establish a digital empowerment and workforce inclusion workforce advisory committee for the purpose of:

(a) Advising the Washington State University global campus on the curriculum and assessments for the workplace digital literacy credential;

(b) Advising policymakers on the impact of digitization and technological advancements on the state's critical industry sectors, businesses, and current and future workers; and

(c) Providing recommendations for education and training investments and support services prioritizing marginalized and underrepresented people and communities, and workers being displaced or whose jobs are degraded by technology.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  Subject to availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the technology access devices for job seekers fund is created to provide access to devices, such as laptops, to job seekers to facilitate job training and employment access. In administering the fund, the board shall:

(1) Establish a transparent application process and system for establishing priorities and selection criteria for local workforce development boards to receive devices under the fund;

(2) Distribute devices and funds to purchase devices to local workforce development councils; and

(3) Monitor the rules, guidelines, and effectiveness of each local workforce development council in use of the devices.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  Subject to availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the Washington State University global campus shall create the Washington digital literacy credential program, which will culminate in the workplace digital literacy credential. The Washington State University global campus shall:

(1) Work with digital career equity act partners and other stakeholders, including community-based and tribal organizations, community and technical college adult basic programs, local workforce development boards, and public libraries to identify and assess existing digital literacy programs, curricula, assessments, and credentials, and establish a free-access repository of information for any provider organization serving marginalized and underrepresented communities across the state;

(2) Provide evaluative information about the learning objectives, cultural appropriateness for targeted populations, accessibility, usefulness and portability of credentials, and cost;

(3) Identify and fill gaps in the curricula and available materials for digital literacy;

(4) Collaborate with institutions of higher education and industry organizations to gather recommendations on the development of the digital literacy credential program and the workplace digital literacy credential; and

(5) Build on its existing credential infrastructure to include a learner employer record or digital credential wallet that can be made available to program participants and credential holders.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  Subject to availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the advance equity in information technology careers mentorship program is established. The board shall contract with a not-for-profit organization with a program connecting industry mentors to community and technical college computer science students to administer the program. The program shall serve up to 60 participants per year in small cohorts or individually. All participants must receive information technology industry navigational awareness and support. Information technology industry mentors must be prioritized to support historically marginalized and underrepresented participants. The program must include a research and evaluation component to help understand and develop supports for overcoming barriers to access for individuals historically marginalized and underrepresented in information technology careers, and the hiring parameters in companies that appear to exclude these individuals.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  Subject to availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the reentry and targeted community workforce development program is established. The department of corrections shall contract with a not-for-profit organization representing the interests of and providing programs and services for underrepresented and marginalized populations in the state to administer the program. Justice-involved individuals with incarceration histories must be prioritized as cohort participants. The program shall provide cohort participants:

(1) Digital and financial literacy training;

(2) Support identifying and overcoming digital barriers;

(3) Employment services such as job searching and interviewing skills;

(4) Case management services;

(5) Placement services including post-placement support;

(6) Job skills training to include, at a minimum, community broadband and infrastructure technician, and help desk technician; and

(7) A living allowance.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  Beginning November 1, 2024, and every two years thereafter, the board shall report to the appropriate committees of the legislature, in accordance with RCW 43.01.036, recommendations on how the state can support job seeker and employer needs in response to the changing information technology workforce. The report must include the recommendations of the digital empowerment and workforce inclusion workforce advisory committee established in section 3 of this act.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  Sections 2 through 8 of this act are each added to chapter 28C.18 RCW.

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