

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1536

As Passed House:

February 27, 2023

Title: An act relating to requirements governing the withholding of high school diplomas.

Brief Description: Clarifying requirements governing the withholding of high school diplomas.

Sponsors: Representatives Timmons, Harris, Bergquist, Ortiz-Self, Walen, Ramel, Morgan, Stonier, Gregerson, Ormsby and Paul.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/6/23, 2/13/23 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/27/23, 74-21.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Makes changes to the authority of school districts to withhold the diplomas of students who lose or willfully damage property, and modifies reporting requirements on this topic.
- Requires community service by a student (that is performed in lieu of the payment of monetary damages) to be credited at the applicable local or state minimum wage, whichever is greater.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Santos, Chair; Shavers, Vice Chair; McEntire, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Callan, Harris, Ortiz-Self, Pollet, Stonier and Timmons.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Rude, Ranking Minority Member; Eslick, McClintock, Sandlin and Steele.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Staff: Ethan Moreno (786-7386).

Background:

A school district may withhold the diploma of a student who is responsible for losing or for willfully cutting, defacing, or injuring the property of the school district, a contractor of the district, an employee, or another student, until the student or the student's parent or guardian has paid for the loss or damage. School districts must adopt procedures to protect students' rights to due process before diplomas are withheld for these reasons.

Each school district that withholds diplomas for these reasons must publish and maintain the following information on its website:

- the number of diplomas withheld, by graduating class, during the previous three school years; and
- the number of students with withheld diplomas who were eligible for free or reduced-price meals during their last two years of enrollment in the school district.

When a student and the student's parent or guardian are unable to pay for the loss or willful damages, the school district must provide a program of community service for the student in lieu of the payment of monetary damages. Upon completion of community service, the student's diploma must be released.

Summary of Bill:

The authority for school districts to withhold the diploma of a student who is responsible for loss or willful damage to property of the school district, a contractor of the district, an employee, or another student is limited to property loss or damages that exceed \$1,000. In addition, school districts are required to release a withheld student's diploma at the earlier of: five years from the date of the student's graduation; or until the amount owed is less than \$1,000.

Community service performed by the student in lieu of payment of monetary damages must be credited at the applicable local or state minimum wage, whichever is greater.

Information about withheld diplomas must be published and maintained in a location on the school district website that facilitates easy access to the information. When publishing required information about withheld diplomas on their websites, school districts must include information about the preceding five years, rather than three years, and must annually update the data from the prior reporting year to reflect the permitted release of diplomas.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This bill builds upon the work of previous years that prevented the withholding of transcripts for students who have met graduation requirements but who have debt for property that was lost or damaged. This bill is the next step in those efforts and is an equity issue for the students who are least able to pay the debt. The state invests so much in students and this bill will help to get those who have met graduation requirements into the workforce.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Joe Timmons, prime sponsor.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.