

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1559

As Reported by House Committee On:
Postsecondary Education & Workforce

Title: An act relating to the student basic needs at public postsecondary institutions act.

Brief Description: Establishing the student basic needs at public postsecondary institutions act.

Sponsors: Representatives Entenman, Fitzgibbon, Stonier, Paul, Riccelli, Bergquist, Pollet and Leavitt.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Postsecondary Education & Workforce: 1/31/23, 2/14/23 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Creates two Student Basic Needs Task Forces.
- Enacts the Free and Reduced-Price Meals Pilot Program.
- Creates a Benefits Navigator Grant Program.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION & WORKFORCE

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Slatter, Chair; Entenman, Vice Chair; Reed, Vice Chair; Hansen, Leavitt, Paul, Pollet and Timmons.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Ybarra, Ranking Minority Member; Chandler, Jacobsen, Klicker and McEntire.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Waters, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Schmidt.

Staff: Saranda Ross (786-7068)

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.

Background:

Several community and technical colleges provide a range of on-campus resource services. Lower Columbia College's One-Stop Center offers students general information and connection with resources. Edmonds College has a Center for Student Cultural Diversity and Inclusion, which provides emergency resources. South Puget Sound Community College's Personal Support Center offers assistance with food, connection to housing and basic needs support, and on-campus childcare and parent support classes.

United Way of King County provides Benefits Hubs to nine community and technical colleges in King County: Bellevue College, Cascadia College, Highline College, Green River College, North Seattle College, Renton Technical College, Seattle Central College, Shoreline Community College, and South Seattle College; and one baccalaureate institution, University of Washington Bothell. The Benefits Hubs offer a variety of services such as financial coaching, basic needs access, food security, and emergency grant help.

In addition to University of Washington Bothell, there are several baccalaureate institutions that offer similar campus benefits resource hubs or services. The Evergreen State College has a Basic Needs Advocacy and Resource Center that provides navigation support for public benefits, housing, and basic needs. The University of Washington Tacoma has an Office of Student Advocacy and Support offering extensive assessment, case management, and resource connections. Central Washington University, Eastern Washington University, Western Washington University, and Washington State University do not offer a centralized, physical resource hub, but do provide case management and access to resources and referrals, such as food pantries.

Summary of Substitute Bill:**Student Basic Needs Task Forces and Strategic Plans.**

Two Student Basic Needs Task Forces (Task Forces) are created: one by an organization representing the presidents of the public four-year institutions of higher education, and one by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (College Board). The Student Achievement Council must provide technical assistance to the Task Forces.

The Task Force created and administered by an organization representing the presidents of the public four-year institutions of higher education must develop a Hunger-Free and Basic Needs Campus Strategic Plan for each public four-year institution of higher education and tribal college. Likewise, the Task Force created and administered by the College Board must develop a single Hunger-Free and Basic Needs Strategic Plan for community and technical colleges.

Each Strategic Plan must:

- collect and disseminate results of the student survey developed by the Student

Achievement Council assessing food security, housing security, and access to basic economic support;

- design a Benefits Resource Hub to assist students with accessing public benefits, emergency financial assistance, and other community resources;
- ensure staffing of at least one Benefits Navigator to assist students in accessing public benefits and existing emergency assistance programs;
- reduce or remove barriers to accessing campus food pantries;
- conduct outreach targeted at likely low-income and food-insecure students by promoting opportunities for benefits assistance and emergency financial resources;
- identify opportunities for partnerships with community-based organizations;
- facilitate discussions amongst community stakeholders on student basic needs; and
- assess the distribution of state funds for basic needs support.

In addition to the duties listed above, the Task Force created and administered by the College Board must also identify how many full-time benefits navigators are necessary to adequately assist the student population of college districts that receive Benefits Resource Hubs.

The findings and activities from each Strategic Plan must be reported to the Legislature by December 1, 2025, and every other year thereafter.

Benefits Navigator Grant Program.

The College Board must design and implement a Benefits Navigator Grant Program (Grant Program) to provide funding for Benefits Navigators at selected community and technical college districts.

Free and Reduced-Price Meals Pilot Program.

An organization representing the presidents of the public four-year institutions of higher education and the College Board must select two public four-year institutions of higher education and four community and technical college districts, respectively, to participate in a pilot program that provides free and low-cost meal plans or food vouchers to eligible low-income students.

Definitions.

Student basic needs are food, water, shelter, clothing, physical health, mental health, childcare, or similar needs that students enrolled at an institution of higher education, tribal institution, or community or technical college may face difficulty with, and that hinder their ability to begin or continue their enrollment.

A Benefits Navigator is an individual employed by an institution of higher education, tribal institution, or community or technical college for the purpose of helping students seek, apply for, and receive assistance from benefits programs, emergency resources, and community resources.

A Benefits Resource Hub is a single location on campus where students are directed to get assistance from a Benefits Navigator to understand what basic needs benefits they may be eligible for and receive assistance in applications, enrollment, and removing barriers to receive support services.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill eliminates the Student Basic Needs Work Group but redistributes and expands its duties to the Task Forces via the Strategic Plans. Instead of requiring institutions of higher education and tribal colleges to each establish Student Basic Needs Task Forces, the substitute bill requires an organization representing the presidents of the public four-year institutions of higher education to create a single Student Basic Needs Task Force. That Task Force must then develop a Hunger-Free and Basic Needs Campus Strategic Plan for each institution.

Similarly, instead of requiring all community and technical colleges to establish individual Student Basic Needs Task Forces, the substitute bill requires the College Board to create one Student Basic Needs Task Force. That Task Force creates a single Hunger-Free and Basic Needs Campus Strategic Plan for community and technical colleges.

The Student Achievement Council must provide technical assistance to both Task Forces.

The substitute bill requires two reports to be provided to the Legislature every other year. One from community and technical college districts, in coordination with the College Board, focused on the findings and activities from the strategic plan and providing recommendations regarding strategies to address student basic needs. The other report must include the same information, but is created by the public four-year institutions of higher education in coordination with an organization representing the presidents of the public four-year institutions of higher education.

The substitute bill also requires the College Board to design and implement a Benefits Navigator Grant Program to provide funding for Benefits Navigators at select community and technical colleges.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on February 14, 2023.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Washington students' basic needs are not being met. People make the choice to go to college because it is a path to independence. This bill will help students stay in school while meeting their basic needs.

This bill creates opportunities for campuses to identify what students need to fulfill their full potential. All students who use existing campus food banks are low income and half are students of color. Students drop out because they are forced to deprioritize education to survive. For example, students have to spend hours working instead of studying, or spend money on food rather than school supplies. College success is not just good grades, it is also good health.

A recent study by the Washington Student Achievement Council found that over 70 percent of students did not use a campus resource to support their needs. This bill would help students identify the resources available to them. While many students already receive grants, scholarships, and access to food pantries, it is not enough. Student meal plans run out by the last month of the quarter, so students turn to food pantries. What is offered there often does not meet nutritional needs, especially for those students who have dietary restrictions. These pantries are underfunded and increasingly serve staff as well as students. Some on-campus pantries only operate once a month due to funding limitations and community pantries are operating beyond their capacity. Transportation to outside food pantries, literacy, and lack of childcare are also barriers. Further, it can be difficult to keep a state Electronic Benefits Transfer card because students have to work 29 hours a week to remain eligible. Students need outreach and education to know what they are eligible for and what is available both on and off campus.

For students to access resources, they have to go to multiple departments and thus have to retell their stories. The process to obtain resources should be trauma-informed and streamlined to reduce the negative impact on mental health.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Debra Entenman, prime sponsor; Joseph Gabriel Burke, Washington Student Association; Alex Hur, Northwest Education Access; Madeline Sprute and Martell Naranjo, Tacoma Community College; Jaeda Nelson, Wildcat Pantry, Central Washington University; Sybil Jordan; Michelle Carrillo; Joel Anderson, University of Washington Graduate and Professional Student Senate; Sopear Chay and Eden McDade, South Puget Sound Community College; Nora Selander, Western Washington University; Sandy Kaiser, The Evergreen State College; Emily Portillo, United Way of King County; Candice Wheeler; Jackson Feaster; Ted Topper; Jacob Katz and Jennifer Dellinger, State Board of Community and Technical Colleges; Alex Davidson, The Associated Students of the University of Washington; Zachary Glenn, University of Washington; Hannah Whobrey, University of Washington Food Pantry; and Yadira Chavez, Community for Our Colleges.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.