

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5119

As of January 27, 2025

Title: An act relating to collective bargaining for certain employees who are enrolled in academic programs at public institutions of higher education.

Brief Description: Concerning collective bargaining for certain employees who are enrolled in academic programs at public institutions of higher education.

Sponsors: Senators Nobles, Stanford, Conway, Frame, Hasegawa, Riccelli, Saldaña, Shewmake, Valdez and Wellman.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Labor & Commerce: 1/27/25.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Grants the right to collectively bargain to student employees at Central Washington University, Eastern Washington University, Western Washington University, and The Evergreen State College who are not currently covered by existing collective bargaining laws.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON LABOR & COMMERCE

Staff: Jarrett Sacks (786-7448)

Background: The Personnel System Reform Act (PSRA) provides for collective bargaining of wages, hours, and other terms and conditions of employment with classified employees of state agencies and institutions of higher education. Employees covered under PSRA include all state civil service employees, unless an exemption applies. In general, student employees are excluded from state civil service laws and, as a result, are excluded from bargaining under PSRA.

Employees of cities, counties, and other political subdivisions of the state, as well as

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.

certain employees of institutions of higher education, bargain their wages and working conditions under the Public Employee's Collective Bargaining Act (PECBA). In 2002, the Legislature granted certain student employees at the University of Washington the right to collectively bargain under PECBA. Similarly, in 2008 the Legislature granted certain student employees at Washington State University the right to collectively bargain.

In 2023, the Legislature granted teaching assistants, research assistants, tutors, readers, graders, and other student employees at Central Washington University, Eastern Washington University, Western Washington University, and The Evergreen State College the right to collective bargaining under PECBA.

Summary of Bill: Employees who are enrolled in an academic or certificate program on any campus of Central Washington University, Eastern Washington University, Western Washington University, and The Evergreen State College are granted the right to collectively bargain under PECBA.

The bill does not include specified higher education and state employees that are already covered under existing collective bargaining law. Executive employees, managers, executive assistants, confidential employees, and employees who assist certain assistant attorneys general are excluded from the bill.

An employee is considered enrolled during campus academic breaks, including any winter, spring, or summer break, if the employee is employed over the course of the campus academic break and is enrolled in an academic or certificate program in the quarter or semester immediately preceding, or subsequent to, the campus academic break.

The scope of bargaining does not include:

- the ability to terminate the employment of any individual if the individual is not meeting academic requirements;
- the amount of tuition or fees, except tuition and fee remission and waiver is within the scope of bargaining;
- the academic calendar; and
- the number of students to be admitted to a particular class or class section.

Bargaining units must include all employees covered under the bill and may not include more than one institution of higher education. Provisions of a collective bargaining agreement relating to compensation must not exceed the amount or percentage established by the Legislature. If any compensation provision is affected by modifications of the budget by the Legislature, both parties must immediately enter into collective bargaining for the sole purpose of arriving at a mutually agreed-upon replacement for the affected provision.

The regional universities and The Evergreen State College may provide additional compensation to student employees that exceeds that provided by the Legislature.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Some student workers can bargain while others cannot. This disparity is unfair and undermines the principles of equality the universities are built on. There are movements throughout the state and country of student workers looking to organize. Many issues can be resolved more efficiently through collective bargaining. Student workers deal with unclear schedules and misinformation, which can lead to choosing between academics and keeping their job.

OTHER: Some concerns will be addressed in the fiscal committees. We need to make sure the bill interacts well with its desire to have students engage in experiential programs.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator T'wina Nobles, Prime Sponsor; Emily Myers, UAW; Leo Curtis, Western Academic Workers United; Alec Acosta-Vega, Working Wildcats; Nathan Tippmann, TESC Student Lobbyist.

OTHER: David Buri, Eastern Washington University.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.