SENATE BILL REPORT
SB 5523

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Higher Education & Workforce Development, February 17, 2025

Title: An act relating to the role of students on the governing boards of institutions of higher education.

Brief Description: Concerning the role of students on the governing boards of institutions of higher education.

Sponsors: Senators Riccelli, Lovelett, Slatter, Nobles, Kauffman, Warnick, Trudeau, Hasegawa, Saldaña, Valdez, Wellman and Wilson, C..

Brief History:
Committee Activity: Higher Education & Workforce Development: 2/03/25, 2/17/25 [DPS-WM, w/oRec].

Brief Summary of First Substitute Bill

- Requires all boards of trustees serving a community and technical college district to have a student trustee.
- Requires an opportunity at each regular board of trustees meeting for a student government representative to provide a report.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5523 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.
Signed by Senators Nobles, Chair; Hansen, Vice Chair; Slatter.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.
Signed by Senators Warnick, Ranking Member; Boehnke.

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: Kellee Gunn (786-7429)

Background: Community and Technical Colleges' Boards of Trustees. There are 34 community and technical colleges (CTCs) in Washington State, in 30 college districts. Each district is governed by a Governor-appointed board of trustees. Each CTC district must have five trustees, except for those boards of trustees who have six because they voted to establish a student trustee.

Each board of trustees shall organize itself by electing a chair from its members. Three members constitutes a quorum, and no action shall be taken by less than a majority of the trustees of the board of trustees.

A trustee's term begins Octobers 1st of the year they are appointed, and a term is for five years. Trustees must be a resident and qualified elector of the college district. A trustee cannot be an employee of the CTC college system, a member of the board of directors of any school district, or a member of the governing board of any public or private educational institution.

Student Trustees. A student trustee's term is one year, and begins July 1st and ends June 30th of the year they are appointed. The student must be in good standing with the college. If the student trustee fails to be enrolled at the college full-time or forfeits their academic standing, they are disqualified and a new student trustee must be appointed. A student trustee must not participate or vote on matters relating to the hiring, discipline, tenure of faculty members and personnel, or any other matters pertaining to collective bargaining agreements.

Power and Duties. Boards of trustees have a number of powers and duties including operating the college, employing the college president, establishing new facilities, borrowing money, and issuing and selling bonds with approval of the State Board for CTCs, establishing fees, granting degrees, and making decisions on housing facilities, among others.

Public Baccalaureate Institutions. There are six public baccalaureate institutions in Washington State: University of Washington, Washington State University, Central Washington University, Western Washington University, Eastern Washington University, and The Evergreen State College.

Summary of Bill (First Substitute): All CTC boards of trustees must have a student trustee. The nomination process must include participation form the college adminisration, to provide input and advice but may not interfere with the associated student government's selcetion of candidates.

The student member must be 18 years of age at the time of their appointment, and enrolled at the college for a minimum of ten credits or the equivalent during their term as trustee.

State funding may not be used for student trustees to travel to meetings other than those regularly scheduled by the college board.

A student must recuse themselves from participation or voting o nissues pertaining to pending litigation. For a vote to be constituted a quorum, there must a majority of trustees present.

The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) may adopt rules relating to establishing student trustees on college boards.

A student government representative at the CTCs and the public baccalaureates shall be given an opportunity to provide an in-person report at each regular board of trustees meeting.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE (First Substitute):

- Requires student board members to recuse themselves from voting on issues pertaining to pending litigation.
- Establishes certain requirements around the nomination process for student trustees, such as involvement by colleges' administration and that the student be at least 18 years of age.
- Establishes that state funding cannot be used for student trustees to travel outside of regularly scheduled meetings.
- Allows the SBCTC to adopt rules relating to implementation of student trustees.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill: *The committee recommended a different version of the bill than what was heard.* PRO: Students deserve a greater say in their education and this bill allows students to have a seat around the table to make sure institutions are hearing their voices. Better decisions are made when students are at the table.

I am the student government president at Tacoma Community College. As a student leader, I report to the board. True representation means to hold a spot at the table. CTCs with the most diversity have not granted students a spot on their boards. We need a more equitable

governance structure.

Historically both Bellevue and Edmonds have student trustees. They both had vacancies during the pandemic and currently Bellevue is without a student trustee. Serving as a student trustee on Bellevue College's Board was one of the more transformative experiences in my life. This was not just symbolic. I was able to participate and advocate for student supports. I helped make policy decisions more impactful. I urge you to pass this bill.

Four-year institutions have had student trustees for decades. CTCs, which serve lower income and are more diverse, have not. Student governments work hard but their influence is limited. The average age of a CTC student is 27. The majority of CTC students are not out of high school, and they should be trusted to participate in the decision-making process. This will also remove stakeholder blindness. There is broad support on this bill. We are working with the House of Representatives sponsor to bring the cost down on this bill.

OTHER: This is very positive policy. We should add language requiring student trustees to recuse themselves from decisions regarding litigation. The SBCTC does an amazing job of onboarding student trustees.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Marcus Riccelli, Prime Sponsor; Sean Behl, Washington Student Association; Heba Qatrani, Washington Student Association; Daniel Ngoy, Bellevue College; Kellen Hoard, Youth on Boards; Randy Phillips, Associated Students of Tacoma Community College; Yana Chubarov, 2023-2024 Bellevue College Student Trustee; Sky Dowling, Associated Students of Green River College.

OTHER: Arlen Harris, SBCTC.

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