

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESHB 1079

As Passed House:

March 10, 2005

Title: An act relating to postsecondary education and training support for former foster youth.

Brief Description: Regarding postsecondary education and training support for foster youth.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Higher Education (originally sponsored by Representatives Kagi, Kenney, Chase, Dickerson and Schual-Berke; by request of Governor Locke).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 2/17/05, 2/25/05 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/10/05, 95-0.

Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill

- Expands the scope of responsibility and membership of an oversight committee on foster youth and education to include promotion of opportunities for postsecondary education and training for foster youth.
- Requires the Higher Education Coordinating Board to place a priority on former foster youth for receipt of financial aid awards under the State Need Grant program and the State Work Study program.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Kenney, Chair; Sells, Vice Chair; Cox, Ranking Minority Member; Rodne, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Buri, Dunn, Fromhold, Hasegawa, Jarrett, Ormsby and Sommers.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Roberts.

Staff: Barbara McLain (786-7383).

Background:

Beginning at age 13, dependent youth in state foster care can receive Independent Living Services to help them prepare for independence. When youth emancipate, or "age out," from foster care at age 18, they are eligible to receive assistance with housing, education, and

employment training until age 21. According to the 2003 Performance Report by the Children's Administration of the Department of Social and Health Services, 470 youth aged out of foster care in 2002. Of these youth, 161 planned to pursue higher education.

In 2003, legislation was enacted creating an oversight committee composed of staff from the Children's Administration, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and advocacy agencies to develop strategies for maintaining foster children in the schools they were attending at the time they entered foster care. The committee also promotes best practices in education of foster care youth.

The Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) administers state financial aid programs for low-income students pursuing higher education. The two primary programs are the State Need Grant (\$236.5 million appropriated for 2003-05) and State Work Study (\$34.1 million appropriated for 2003-05). Students are eligible for a need grant if they have a family income less than 55 percent of the state median family income, are enrolled at least part-time, and pursue a degree or certificate. Need grant is not an entitlement, but the program attempts to serve all eligible students within available funds. For the 2003-04 academic year, approximately 53,500 students received need grant awards, but 6,000 eligible students went unserved.

The State Work Study program served approximately 7,700 financially needy students in 2003-04. In its administration of the program, the HECB is directed to place a priority on state resident students, job placements that relate to the student's academic or vocational pursuits, and off-campus community service placements.

Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill:

The membership of the Children's Administration oversight committee on education of foster youth is expanded to include the Higher Education Coordinating Board, foster youth, former foster youth, and foster parents. The scope of responsibilities of the committee is expanded to include promotion of opportunities for foster youth to participate in postsecondary education or training.

The committee will:

1. assess the statewide need among foster youth for assistance in pursuing postsecondary education and training;
2. identify sources of funding to provide such assistance;
3. review the effectiveness of existing activities and identify new activities to support former foster youth in pursuing postsecondary education and training; and
4. review progress toward improving educational and vocational outcomes for foster youth.

The HECB, when making annual awards of state need grants, will give consideration to former foster youth. Eligible former foster youth are guaranteed a state need grant when funds from grants that were declined, forfeited or otherwise unused are disbursed. The HECB

must also place a priority on providing work opportunities for former foster youth through the State Work Study program.

A former foster youth is defined as a person who is at least 18 but not more than 24 years old, and who was a dependent of the Department of Social and Health Services at the time the youth turned 18.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: (Original bill) Tremendous hurdles face foster youth in finishing their high school education and moving on. We are all aware of the gravity of this problem. The bill tries to focus on that problem and bring greater coordination to solutions, as well as ensure that financial resources are there to assist former foster youth. A coordinating committee was established a few years ago to deal with secondary education, and communication among the system and agencies has improved tremendously. The committee would like to see its responsibilities expanded to include coordination of services to support higher education.

Foster youth are more likely to go on to college if they have early information as well as resources to help them. A set-aside within the State Need Grant and State Work Study sends a message that resources will be available. Creating a guarantee is necessary because now the only thing that can be said is that funds "likely" will be there. We owe this financial commitment to foster youth because the state serves as the parent. This special relationship warrants a set-aside and an early commitment that they will receive financial assistance. This is a wise investment that will pay off to help foster youth become productive members of society. One way to ensure that State Need Grant funds are available for all eligible students is to fully fund the program, but that is not always the case. There is a precedent in other states where state assistance is provided for foster youth to attend college.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: (Original bill) Representative Kagi, prime sponsor; Sherry Bloomer and Hollis Hill, Treehouse for Kids; Mary Herrick and Chereese Phillips, Washington Education Foundation; Becki Collins, Higher Education Coordinating Board; Nani Jackins Park, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; and Wes Pruitt, Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.