

RCW 28B.117.005 Findings—Intent. (1)(a) The legislature finds that with the creation of the passport to college promise program this state took a significant step toward providing higher education opportunities to youth and alumni of foster care. The passport to college promise program not only provides financial aid to former foster youth but, just as important, it recognizes the critical role of wraparound services and provides early outreach to foster care youth regarding postsecondary higher educational opportunities. Since 2007, the passport to college promise program has increased the number of former foster youth enrolling in higher education and working toward college degrees.

(b) Recognizing the success of creating pathways for foster youth to access higher education, the legislature now seeks to create an additional postsecondary pathway through access to registered apprenticeships or recognized preapprenticeships. Former foster and unaccompanied homeless youth face critical hurdles to accessing registered apprenticeships and recognized preapprenticeships. The first is a lack of information regarding preparation for and enrolling in registered apprenticeships or recognized preapprenticeships. The second is finding the financial resources to begin and continue in an apprenticeship or preapprenticeship. As a result of the unique hurdles and challenges that face youth in and alumni of foster care and unaccompanied homeless and former homeless youth, a disproportionate number of them are part of society's large group of marginalized youth.

(c) The legislature reiterates its earlier recognition of the critical role education plays in improving outcomes for youth in and alumni of foster care and unaccompanied homeless and former homeless youth, as well as the key role played by wraparound services in providing continuity and seamless transitions to postsecondary credential programs. With the creation of a parallel pathway with a passport for registered apprenticeships or recognized preapprenticeships, including for the provision of wraparound services, the legislature strives to make Washington the leader in the nation with respect to foster and unaccompanied homeless youth graduating from high school and enrolling in and achieving a postsecondary credential.

(d) The legislature further finds that students experiencing homelessness face similar challenges and educational outcomes as their peers in foster care. In 2016, fifty-three and two-fifths percent of Washington youth experiencing homelessness graduated from high school on time, compared to seventy-nine percent of their peers. Students experiencing homelessness are more likely to be students of color, chronically absent, and have lower test scores in reading and math. Homeless students may also be former foster youth and foster youth may be formerly homeless students. Similar to youth in foster care, students experiencing homelessness need opportunities for financial aid, wraparound services, and early outreach regarding postsecondary higher educational opportunities and apprenticeships.

(2) It is the intent of the legislature to create the passport to careers program with two programmatic pathways: The passport to college promise program and the passport to apprenticeship opportunities. The passport to careers program expands upon the passport to college promise program created in 2007 to include a program of financial assistance for eligible youth and young adults to participate in apprenticeship or preapprenticeship programs called the

passport to apprenticeship opportunities program. The passport to careers program will have three primary components:

(a) Outreach to foster and unaccompanied homeless youth and young adults regarding the higher education and registered apprenticeship opportunities available to them, how to apply, and how to apply for and obtain financial aid;

(b) Provide financial support to former foster and unaccompanied homeless youth to assist with the costs of their public undergraduate college education or provide financial assistance to meet apprenticeship or preapprenticeship program minimum qualifications and occupational-specific costs and the supportive services to help them apply and complete a registered apprenticeship or recognized preapprenticeship; and

(c) Measurably increase the number of foster and homeless youth accessing and completing higher education or registered apprenticeship programs and successfully entering and retaining employment. [2018 c 232 § 1; 2013 c 39 § 11; 2007 c 314 § 1.]

Short title—2018 c 232: See note following RCW 28B.117.010.