
OLR Bill Analysis

HB 5668

AN ACT REQUIRING THE OFFICE OF HIGHER EDUCATION TO ESTABLISH A MICROCREDENTIAL PILOT PROGRAM.

SUMMARY

This bill requires the Office of Higher Education (OHE), in consultation with the Board of Regents for Higher Education, to establish a pilot program by January 1, 2022, to develop a virtual platform for state residents to earn or renew a microcredential offered by a microcredential provider.

The bill defines a microcredential as a digital badge (i.e., an indicator of accomplishment or skill that can be displayed, accessed, and verified online) earned in no more than six months by completing for-credit or noncredit coursework and demonstrating mastery of a specific skill. A “microcredential provider” is a higher education institution, employer in the state, professional association, or other entity that develops and offers a microcredential.

The bill requires OHE to consult with the departments of Economic and Community Development and Labor to identify shortages in the state labor market and solicit the participation of microcredential providers to offer microcredentials on the virtual platform that address the shortages.

The bill also requires OHE to develop and distribute a survey to people who complete a microcredential to obtain their completion goals, employment status, and their experience with the microcredential coursework and virtual platform.

The bill creates a “microcredential account” as a separate, non-lapsing General Fund account to contain enrollment fees and fees from employers who post job opportunities on the platform.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2021

VIRTUAL PLATFORM

The bill allows OHE to contract with a third-party administrator to develop and administer the virtual platform. The administrator must provide this service at its lowest available rate. Under the bill, the virtual platform must include: (1) a catalog of available microcredentials with provider provided information, (2) online support for all virtual platform users, and (3) a means for employers and higher education institutions to pre-purchase microcredentials for employee and student distribution.

The platform must also include an access portal for:

1. a microcredential provider to develop and offer microcredentials;
2. state residents to (a) earn or renew microcredentials, (b) share the receipt of microcredentials with employers or higher education institutions, and (c) submit applications for job opportunities posted on the virtual platform; and
3. employers in the state to post job opportunities that require skills that can be demonstrated through one or more microcredentials.

The bill requires each virtual platform user to register in OHE's prescribed form and manner.

MICROCREDENTIAL PROVIDER REGISTRATION

Under the bill, each microcredential provider must submit information for each new microcredential it offers, including:

1. the microcredential name;
2. whether the microcredential is industry-recognized;
3. whether a microcredential is offered through synchronous or asynchronous coursework;

4. the enrollment fee, if any, provided the fee must not exceed an OHE-established amount;
5. the expected time for completion;
6. any required prerequisites, provided related work experience must be allowed in lieu of course prerequisites whenever possible;
7. the effective period of a microcredential if the microcredential is for limited duration;
8. the rubric a microcredential provider uses to determine successful demonstrated mastery of the skill related to the microcredential; and
9. if the microcredential provider is a higher education institution, the number of college credits earned upon completion and the microcredential career pathway, including certificate or degree programs where the completed credits may be applied.

Under the bill, OHE may deny access to the virtual platform to any microcredential provider that offers one or more microcredentials that do not meet academic or industry standards of employers and higher education institutions. OHE must establish a process for providers to appeal access denial.

SURVEY

Under the bill, OHE must distribute a survey to a person who has completed a microcredential within six months of completion. The survey must include questions about the person's (1) goals for completing the microcredential, (2) employment status, (3) experience with the coursework and the virtual platform, and (4) intention to use the virtual platform in the future to earn other microcredentials or to seek employment.

MICROCREDENTIAL ACCOUNT

The bill creates a "microcredential account," as a separate, non-

lapsing General Fund account. The account must contain any money required by law to be deposited into it.

Under the bill, employers posting job opportunities on the virtual platform are required to submit a fee in the amount OHE establishes, and any fee must be deposited into the account. OHE must spend fees paid into the account (1) to compensate microcredential providers and (2) for reasonable and necessary virtual platform administration expenses.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

The bill requires OHE, by January 1, 2023, and annually thereafter, to submit to the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee a report that includes:

1. the catalog of microcredentials available on the virtual platform, highlighting any new microcredentials offered and ceased during the prior year;
2. the number of registered users on the virtual platform by user type;
3. the number of enrolled students and students who complete each microcredential;
4. the student survey results; and
5. in the final report, OHE's decision on whether to permanently establish or terminate the pilot program.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

Joint Favorable

Yea 22 Nay 0 (03/22/2021)