

HCS HB 411 -- VIRTUAL EDUCATION

SPONSOR: Lichtenegger

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on Higher Education by a vote of 12 to 0. Voted "Do Pass" by the Committee on Rules- Administrative Oversight by a vote of 9 to 0.

This bill adds approved virtual institutions to the Access Missouri Financial Assistance Program, as described within the bill.

An approved virtual institution must be organized as a nonprofit institution; accredited by a regional accrediting agency recognized by the United States Department of Education; have established and continuously maintained a physical campus or location of operation in Missouri; maintain at least 25 full-time Missouri employees, at least one-half of which must be faculty or administrators engaged in Missouri operations; enroll at least 1000 Missouri residents as degree or certificate seeking students; be recognized as a qualifying institution by gubernatorial executive order, unless such order is rescinded; utilize an exclusively competency-based education model; and maintain a governing body or advisory board based in Missouri with oversight of Missouri operations.

This bill is similar to SCS HB 1716 (2016).

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that virtual institutions target those adults that have some college but no degree. When developed it was determined it needed to be affordable and competency based. Offers a more affordable option over most brick and mortar institutions. This will provide additional opportunities for Missouri residents in higher education and will help under served populations.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Lichtenegger; Western Governor's University (WGU); Sarah Davis; Missouri Department of Higher Education; and Missouri Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

OPPONENTS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.

OTHERS: Others testifying on the bill say this program currently serves roughly 50,000 people. Without additional funding in the upcoming year students are looking at a reduced award amount. It is a bit different from last year's bill which was tied to an executive order.

Testifying on the bill was Independent Colleges & Universities Association.