

1 **Senate Bill No. 646**

2 (By Senators Laird, Plymale, Foster, Miller and Stollings)

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4 [Introduced February 17, 2012; referred to the Committee on
5 Education.]

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10 A BILL to amend the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, by
11 adding thereto a new section, designated §18-2-6b, relating to
12 the General Educational Development Diploma (GED); making
13 legislative findings; setting forth legislative intent; and
14 requiring the State Board of Education to study GED issues and
15 make a report with recommendations by a certain date.

16 *Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:*

17 That the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, be amended
18 by adding thereto a new section, designated §18-2-6b, to read as
19 follows:

20 **ARTICLE 2. STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION.**

21 **§18-2-6b. General Educational Development diploma; legislative
22 findings and intent; examination costs; testing**

1 **materials and procedures; report required.**

2 (a) The Legislature makes the following findings related to
3 the General Educational Development (GED) examination:

4 (1) The GED examination is an instrument for success that can
5 keep a student from dropping out of school and can transform the
6 future for both school age and adult individuals who attain a GED
7 diploma. One in every seven Americans with a high school
8 credential has received the GED, as well as one in every twenty
9 college students. For those who have not graduated from high
10 school, attaining a GED diploma greatly increases their employment
11 opportunities and earning potential.

12 (2) While West Virginia's average per-capita income has
13 increased over the past ten years as the state's economy has held
14 steady or grown slightly, most other states have shown declines.
15 Despite these positive changes, West Virginia still ranks as one of
16 the five poorest states in the nation. Additionally, many counties
17 within the state fall far below the state average; therefore, the
18 current cost of the GED examination would be difficult for many
19 citizens to afford without help and significant increases will make
20 the cost of the GED examination prohibitive.

21 (3) In addition to the cost factor, large areas of West
22 Virginia are without broadband Internet access or without adequate
23 broadband Internet access speeds, which results in diminished

1 opportunities for rural residents to participate in the rapidly
2 unfolding digital revolution compared to their nonrural neighbors.
3 Citizens living in these areas have few opportunities to become
4 adept in computer technology and, therefore, most, especially
5 adults seeking to earn a GED years after leaving the public school
6 system, are not proficient or even comfortable using the Internet.

7 (4) Individuals who can benefit most from earning a GED
8 diploma are those who lack many of the skills needed to secure
9 employment or to function successfully in an age dependent upon
10 technology. They also are those who lack the financial resources
11 to obtain the needed skills so most citizens for whom the GED
12 diploma becomes unattainable are likely to remain in a state of
13 poverty.

14 (b) It is the intent of the Legislature to make the GED
15 diploma available to the widest possible range of state residents
16 who have not achieved a high school diploma. To keep the GED
17 diploma within reach of state citizens, the Legislature intends to
18 examine the following issues:

19 (1) Impact on prospective GED test takers of the proposed
20 changes in the design and delivery of the qualifying examination
21 made by the American Council on Education (ACE) in 2011;

22 (2) Impact of the increase in costs per test taker; and

23 (3) Alternatives available to reduce costs and to retain the

1 option of pen and paper testing for those who desire it.

2 (c) Therefore, in view of the findings and intent set forth in
3 subsections (a) and (b) of this section, respectively, the state
4 board shall undertake an exhaustive study of the issues surrounding
5 administration of the GED examination in the state including, but
6 not limited to, the following:

7 (1) Analysis of research and/or pilot testing that was done in
8 West Virginia by the American Council on Education prior to their
9 decision to eliminate paper and pen examinations, including
10 justifications offered for eliminating this type examination as a
11 possible option;

12 (2) Determination of the current and future costs to the state
13 to provide GED examinations free of charge to eligible test takers;
14 and

15 (3) Recommendations for statutory or policy changes to achieve
16 the following goals:

17 (A) Reducing or controlling escalating costs of administering
18 the GED examinations; and

19 (B) Retaining paper and pen testing for those individuals who
20 request or require it; or

21 (C) Eliminating or reducing significantly the difficulty for
22 individuals who are not comfortable or proficient in taking online
23 examinations.

1 (d) The state board shall complete its work and report its
2 findings, conclusions and recommendations, together with drafts of
3 any legislation or policy changes necessary to effectuate the
4 recommendations, to the Legislative Oversight Commission on
5 Education Accountability no later than July 1, 2012.

(NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to examine the issues surrounding proposed changes in administration and costs of examinations to receive a General Educational Development (GED) Diploma. The bill sets forth legislative findings and intent. The bill requires the State Board of Education make a study of the issues concerning the GED, including costs of administering the examinations and exploring optional pen and paper testing. The bill requires the report and recommendations be made by July 1, 2012.

This section is new; therefore, strike-throughs and underscoring have been omitted.)