



Senate Fiscal Agency
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BILL ANALYSIS



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Senate Bill 744 (Substitute S-1 as passed the Senate)
Sponsor: Senator Patricia L. Birkholz
Committee: Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs

Date Completed: 1-16-04

RATIONALE

Population expansion, urban sprawl, and reliance on nonrenewable sources of energy have heightened interest in protecting and conserving land, water, and air. Many recognize education as one tool against further degradation of the environment. Michigan's K-12 curriculum framework includes a strand on ecosystems, where the objective is for students to learn how communities of living things interact, including how humans interact with the environment. Michigan students also learn about the environment in nature centers, visitors' centers, museums, camps, and zoos, and in youth organizations such as 4-H and Scouts. In order to promote environmental education, it has been suggested that a State-wide award and grant program be established to recognize and reward outstanding environmental educators each year.

CONTENT

The bill would amend Part 25 (Environmental Education) of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act to require the establishment of the Teacher Environmental and Conservation Honors (T.E.A.C.H.) program to recognize Michigan teachers who demonstrate teaching excellence in K-12 environmental education; and provide that an award could include a grant of up to \$5,000 for use in the implementation of environmental education projects.

The Coordinator of Environmental Education within the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) would have to establish and administer the T.E.A.C.H. award and the corresponding grant program. For fiscal years ending September 30, 2004, 2005, and 2006,

\$50,000 from the Environmental Education Fund would have to be used each year for the grants. (The Fund consists of 25% of civil fines collected annually under Part 31 (Water Resources Protection), Part 111 (Hazardous Waste Management) and Part 115 (Solid Waste Management), and is capped at \$150,000 per fiscal year.)

Nominations for awards would have to be submitted to the Coordinator in a manner required by the Coordinator and contain information he or she required. Any person could nominate an eligible teacher for a T.E.A.C.H. award. "Eligible teacher" would mean an individual who taught environmental education to K-12 aged youth in a public or private school, or through a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization.

A T.E.A.C.H. award recipient also would be eligible for a grant to implement and administer an environmental education project that focused on providing a learning experience for students to become better stewards of the State's natural resources. An application for a grant would have to be submitted at the same time as the nomination. A nominee would have to provide a specific project proposal describing how the grant would be used. The maximum amount of a grant would be \$5,000, but award recipients would be eligible to receive more than one grant. Environmental education projects in any of the following areas would have to be considered for grants: Great Lakes or water quality, land conservation, and air quality.

From among the T.E.A.C.H. award recipients, each year the Coordinator would have to select one to be honored as the State's

"Environmental Education Teacher of the Year". The Coordinator would have to provide appropriate recognition to the recipient of the award. In administering the T.E.A.C.H. program, the Coordinator would have to provide for an equitable distribution of T.E.A.C.H. awards given to teachers from all parts of the State, and an equitable distribution of grants to teachers from organizations and schools of varying sizes.

By October 31, 2005, the DEQ would have to prepare and submit to the Legislature a report that evaluated the T.E.A.C.H. award and grant program. The report would have to specify all of the following: the name of each T.E.A.C.H. award recipient and the school where he or she taught on the date the award was given; the amount of each grant awarded and how it was used; and the DEQ's evaluation of the T.E.A.C.H. award and grant program, and whether they should be continued.

MCL 324.2505 et al.

ARGUMENTS

(Please note: The arguments contained in this analysis originate from sources outside the Senate Fiscal Agency. The Senate Fiscal Agency neither supports nor opposes legislation.)

Supporting Argument

By providing teachers with funding to further environmental education, the bill could promote greater environmental literacy throughout the State. The bill also would advance professionalism among environmental educators by recognizing some of Michigan's excellent teachers. Environmental educators both in traditional K-12 classrooms and in nature centers, parks, and regional education centers can have a profound impact on how students see themselves in relationship to their environment, and should be rewarded. For example, educators at the Great Lakes Education Program, located in Wayne and Macomb Counties, teach fourth-grade students and their teachers about the unique features of the Great Lakes through classroom instruction and a field trip on Lake St. Clair and the Detroit River. After-school programs such as 4-H, Scouts, and Camp Fire Boys and Girls Clubs also offer many students a direct opportunity to learn about nature from enthusiastic, knowledgeable leaders. National programs such as Project Wild and Project Learning Tree employ educators who teach K-

12 lessons on wildlife, air and water quality, land use, and other ecological topics to school children and their teachers. Whether working within a school or in another setting, environmental education is centered around a common goal: Helping students become better stewards of the earth's natural resources.

Michigan has a rich history in environmental education, as it has been home to Liberty Hyde Bailey, a Grand Haven native and Michigan State University graduate who chaired President Theodore Roosevelt's Commission on Country Life in 1908, was dean of the agricultural college at Cornell University, and pioneered the field of "nature study". More recently, Michigan was home to William Stapp, a former Ann Arbor Public School teacher and University of Michigan, School of Natural Resources professor who is widely regarded as the founder of environmental education. Michigan's legacy underscores the importance of establishing a State-wide award program for outstanding environmental educators.

Response: While the bill would honor teachers in public and private schools as well as those who educate through nonprofit organizations, it would limit the award to those who teach grades K-12. Many outstanding environmental educators work in colleges and universities. There, they are uniquely able to identify, instruct, and mentor students who have the potential to become outstanding educators themselves. The late William Stapp, for example, strongly influenced many students at the University of Michigan--and throughout the world--with his commitment to solving the root causes of environmental issues. In fact, Bill Stapp was the first chief of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's Environmental Education Section, and was nominated for a Nobel Prize in 1993. Teachers such as he also should be eligible for the T.E.A.C.H. award and grant because they influence future generations of environmental educators.

Legislative Analyst: Claire Layman

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill would not increase or decrease revenue to the State, but would divert \$50,000 of annual revenue in the

Environmental Education Fund to a new award program for three years. The Fund receives \$150,000 annually from selected civil fines and is used to operate a clearinghouse of environmental education materials and make them available to educators in the State.

Fiscal Analyst: Jessica Runnels

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This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.