CHAPTER 62

POSTSECONDARY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS — ACCREDITATION

H.F. 295

AN ACT relating to accreditation of postsecondary educational institutions, prohibiting adverse action by accrediting agencies against certain postsecondary educational institutions for compliance with state law, providing remedies, and including effective date provisions.

Be It Enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Iowa:

Section 1. SHORT TITLE. This Act shall be known and may be cited as the "Accreditation Autonomy Act".

Sec. 2. Section 147A.1, subsection 13, Code 2025, is amended to read as follows:

13. *"Training program"* means an Iowa college approved by ~~the higher learning commission~~ any federally recognized accreditor of postsecondary educational institutions, an Iowa hospital authorized by the department, or a medical care ambulance service or nontransport service that has received authorization from the department to conduct emergency medical care services training.

Sec. 3. Section 147A.17, subsection 1, Code 2025, is amended to read as follows:

1. An Iowa college approved by ~~the higher learning commission~~ any federally recognized accreditor of postsecondary educational institutions, an Iowa hospital in this state, or a medical care ambulance service or nontransport service that desires to provide emergency medical care services training leading to certification as an emergency medical care provider shall apply to the department for authorization to establish a training program.

Sec. 4. Section 256.183, subsection 1, paragraphs a, b, and c, Code 2025, are amended to read as follows:

a. Is accredited by ~~the higher learning commission~~ any federally recognized accreditor of postsecondary educational institutions.

b. Is accredited by ~~the higher learning commission~~ any federally recognized accreditor of postsecondary educational institutions, is exempt from taxation under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, and annually provides a matching aggregate amount of institutional financial aid equal to at least seventy-five percent of the amount received in a fiscal year by the institution's students for Iowa tuition grant assistance under this part. Commencing with the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2006, the matching aggregate amount of institutional financial aid shall increase by the percentage of increase each fiscal year of funds appropriated for Iowa tuition grants under section 256.194, subsection 1, to a maximum match of one hundred percent. The institution shall file annual reports with the commission prior to receipt of tuition grant moneys under this part. An institution whose income is not exempt from taxation under section 501(c) of the Internal Revenue Code and whose students were eligible to receive Iowa tuition grant money in the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2003, shall meet the match requirements of this paragraph no later than June 30, 2005.

c. Is a specialized college that is accredited by ~~the higher learning commission~~ any federally recognized accreditor of postsecondary educational institutions, and which offers health professional programs that are affiliated with health care systems located in Iowa.

Sec. 5. Section 260C.47, subsection 1, unnumbered paragraph 1, Code 2025, is amended to read as follows:

The state board of education shall establish an accreditation process for community college programs. The process shall be jointly developed and agreed upon by the department of education and the community colleges. The state accreditation process shall be integrated with the accreditation process of ~~the higher learning commission~~ a federally recognized accreditor of postsecondary educational institutions selected by the board, ~~including the evaluation cycle, the self study process, and the criteria for evaluation,~~ which shall incorporate the standards for community colleges developed under section 260C.48;

and shall identify and make provision for the needs of the state that are not met by the ~~commission's~~ accreditor's accreditation process. The department of education shall use a two-component process for the continued accreditation of community college programs.

Sec. 6. NEW SECTION. **261K.1 Definitions.**

For purposes of this chapter, unless the context otherwise requires:

1. *"Accrediting agency"* means an entity that provides accreditation of public institutions of higher education and that is not a government agency.

2. *"Public institution of higher education"* means an institution of higher learning governed by the state board of regents or a community college.

Sec. 7. NEW SECTION. **261K.2 Accrediting agencies — adverse action against institutions for compliance with state law prohibited.**

1. An accrediting agency shall not take any adverse action against a public institution of higher education for complying with a state law or refusing to violate a state law.

2. Any adverse action taken by an accrediting agency against a public institution of higher education based, in whole or in part, on the institution's compliance with a state law or refusal to violate a state law constitutes a violation of this section that is subject to section 261K.3.

Sec. 8. NEW SECTION. **261K.3 Civil action.**

A public institution of higher education that is negatively affected by adverse action taken against the institution by an accrediting agency in violation of section 261K.2 may bring a civil action against the accrediting agency in this state if authorized by the attorney general. The attorney general may bring the action on behalf of the institution. The institution or attorney general may obtain injunctive relief and liquidated damages in the amount of the federal financial aid received by the institution in the academic year preceding the violation, as well as court costs and reasonable attorney fees.

Sec. 9. EFFECTIVE DATE. This Act, being deemed of immediate importance, takes effect upon enactment.

Approved May 6, 2025