

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Session 119

Date *November 7th, 2019*



ASSOCIATED STUDENTS OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Submitted by Bryn Sinclair, Senate Vice Speaker

BOARD BILL 5.03: Resolution addressing student absences due to short-term medical reasons and the use of "medical excuse notes" by faculty

SPONSOR: Camille Hattwig

OUTCOME: 49-0-2

WHEREAS existing University of Washington policy (Student Governance and Policies, Chapter 112) states that students who are “absent from any examination or class activity through sickness or other cause judged by the instructor to be unavoidable shall be given an opportunity to take a rescheduled examination or perform work judged by the instructor to be the equivalent”; and

WHEREAS thousands of students are annually asked by faculty to provide documentation from a medical professional attesting to the “unavoidable” nature of their short-term illness; and

WHEREAS students who are forced into visiting a medical provider for the sole purpose of obtaining a medical excuse note are pressured into engaging in a costly, and potentially risk, patient-provider relationship without necessarily having an immediate medical need; and

WHEREAS in most cases of short-term illness, providers must rely on students’ descriptions of their symptoms – sometimes after the illness has already passed leaving the provider with little to no basis for evaluation; and

WHEREAS students who are forced into visiting a medical provider for the sole purpose of obtaining a medical excuse note are pressured into ensuring that they describe their symptoms in such a way that medical providers are guaranteed to provide them with a medical excuse note, which may then lead to tests and procedures that incur risk and/or are physically harmful; and

WHEREAS providers are trained to be patient advocates and are thus almost always guaranteed to issue medical excuse notes for their patients resulting in no meaningful check on student behavior; and

WHEREAS Hall Health is booked to and over capacity, thus students who want to procure medical excuse notes without having a substantial medical need are inadvertently decreasing access for students with who require care and need to be seen; and

WHEREAS staff members at Hall Health estimate that \$250,000 is annually spent on attending to some 2,500 medical excuse note requests – approximately five percent of student visits; and

WHEREAS requiring students to procure and submit medical excuse notes significantly disadvantages students from marginalized communities who are less likely to be adequately insured (low income students, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) students, minority students, etc.),

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE ASSOCIATED STUDENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON BOARD OF DIRECTORS

THAT the ASUW strongly endorses the revision of Student Governance and Policies Chapter 112 to specifically prohibit faculty from requiring documentation from medical professionals to determine whether to grant accommodations for student absences due to short-term medical causes; and

THAT that the ASUW urges the Faculty Senate, the Faculty Council on Student Affairs, the Faculty Council on Teaching and Learning, and the Faculty Council on Academic Standards to develop guidance and curricular support to strengthen student-faculty communication concerning student absences, ensure the academic integrity of student work, and promote the health and well-being of all University of Washington students; and; and

THAT this bill be forwarded to Joseph Janes, Faculty Senate chair; Mike Townsend, Secretary of the faculty; Chris Laws, Faculty Council on Student Affairs chair; Thomas Halverson, Faculty Council on Teaching and Learning chair; Ann Huppert and Dan Ratner, Faculty Council on Academic Standards co-chairs; Sam Akeyo, ASUW director of university affairs; and Kelty Pierce, ASUW president.

End