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TRANSPARENCY IN COLLEGE TEXTBOOK PUBLISHING PRACTICES ACT (AB 1548)

Background

- With rising tuition ("fees") and living expenses and diminishing student aid, the price of textbooks represents an increasing portion of the overall cost of higher education, impacting students in the University of California, California State University, and community college segments.
- California college students spend an average nearly \$1000 per year on textbooks, which is more than the tuition for many community college students.
- According to a 2005 GAO report, college textbook prices have increased by 186 percent between 1986 and 2004, almost triple the rate of inflation over the same period.
- Most faculty rarely use bundled textbooks (i.e. books shrink-wrapped with CD ROMs and workbooks) in their courses, which are more expensive than unbundled textbooks.

Problem

The increasing prices of textbooks have climbed to levels that deny some students access to a high quality, affordable education in the state of California. Publishers have contributed to the rising costs of textbooks by shortening revision cycles so that, as new editions become available, used textbooks become obsolete, leaving students unable to sell or buy less expensive, used versions. Additionally, textbook publishers also "bundle" supplemental materials such as workbooks and CD-ROMS with textbooks to increase prices.

Solution

To make publishers better corporate citizens and ensure California's students have access to high-quality, affordable educational materials, publishers of textbooks must provide more transparency in their publishing practices.

AB 1548 would prohibit public postsecondary education institution from buying, selling, or allowing the sale on its campus of a textbook unless and until the publisher of that textbook makes the following information publicly available:

- the price difference between bundled textbooks and the same unbundled textbooks
- the substantive differences between new editions and prior editions of textbooks
- estimates of how long new editions of textbooks will remain in print
- the amount and recipient of any compensation provided to faculty or administrators as inducement to adopt particular textbooks for university courses, except for sample copies or royalties

(Pursuant to existing law, the bill would apply to the University of California only to the extent that the regents act to make these provisions applicable.) The bill would authorize the Attorney General, a district attorney, or any affected resident of California to bring a civil action to enforce the bill.

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