S-2196.1

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**SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 5547**

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**State of Washington 64th Legislature 2015 Regular Session**

**By** Senate Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Bailey, Rivers, Angel, Becker, Warnick, Honeyford, and Padden)

AN ACT Relating to requiring a minimum grade point average or equivalent to distribute state need grant awards; and amending RCW 28B.92.060.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

**Sec.**  RCW 28B.92.060 and 2012 c 229 s 558 are each amended to read as follows:

In awarding need grants, the office shall proceed substantially as follows: PROVIDED, That nothing contained herein shall be construed to prevent the office, in the exercise of its sound discretion, from following another procedure when the best interest of the program so dictates:

(1) The office shall annually select the financial aid award recipients from among Washington residents applying for student financial aid who have been ranked according to:

(a) Financial need as determined by the amount of the family contribution; and

(b) Other considerations, such as whether the student is a former foster youth, or is a placebound student who has completed an associate of arts or associate of science degree or its equivalent.

(2) The financial need of the highest ranked students shall be met by grants depending upon the evaluation of financial need until the total allocation has been disbursed. Funds from grants which are declined, forfeited or otherwise unused shall be reawarded until disbursed, except that eligible former foster youth shall be assured receipt of a grant. The office, in consultation with four-year institutions of higher education, the council, and the state board for community and technical colleges, shall develop award criteria and methods of disbursement based on level of need, and not solely rely on a first-come, first-served basis.

(3)(a) A student shall be eligible to receive a state need grant for up to five years, or the credit or clock hour equivalent of five years, or up to one hundred twenty-five percent of the published length of time of the student's program. A student may not start a new associate degree program as a state need grant recipient until at least five years have elapsed since earning an associate degree as a need grant recipient, except that a student may earn two associate degrees concurrently.

(b)(i) Qualifications for renewal will include maintaining satisfactory academic progress toward completion of an eligible program as determined by the office and maintain the grade point averages in this subsection, except for those students attending The Evergreen State College. Students enrolled at The Evergreen State College must meet the requirements of the college's satisfactory academic progress policy for state financial aid to remain qualified.

(A) The minimum grade point average for a student's first renewal must be at least a 2.25 grade point average.

(B) The minimum grade point average for all subsequent renewal awards must be at least a 2.5 grade point average.

(ii) The lost award revenues from students not meeting the minimum grade point averages in (b)(i) of this subsection shall be provided and equally distributed to students who meet the standards in (b)(i)(B) of this subsection. The redistribution of renewal awards shall not result in any net increase or decrease in total appropriations.

(iii) A student is exempt from the grade point average requirement in (b)(i) of this subsection for one or more of the following reasons:

(A) Because of the birth of a child of the student and in order to care for the child;

(B) Because of the placement of a child with the student for adoption or foster care;

(C) In order to care for a family member of the student if the family member has a serious health condition as defined in RCW 49.78.020; or

(D) Because the student has a serious health condition as defined in RCW 49.78.020.

(c) Should the recipient terminate his or her enrollment for any reason during the academic year, the unused portion of the grant shall be returned to the state educational grant fund by the institution according to the institution's own policy for issuing refunds, except as provided in RCW 28B.92.070.

(4) In computing financial need, the office shall determine a maximum student expense budget allowance, not to exceed an amount equal to the total maximum student expense budget at the public institutions plus the current average state appropriation per student for operating expense in the public institutions. Any child support payments received by students who are parents attending less than half-time shall not be used in computing financial need.

(5)(a) A student who is enrolled in three to six credit-bearing quarter credits, or the equivalent semester credits, may receive a grant for up to one academic year before beginning a program that leads to a degree or certificate.

(b) An eligible student enrolled on a less-than-full-time basis shall receive a prorated portion of his or her state need grant for any academic period in which he or she is enrolled on a less-than-full-time basis, as long as funds are available.

(c) An institution of higher education may award a state need grant to an eligible student enrolled in three to six credit-bearing quarter credits, or the semester equivalent, on a provisional basis if:

(i) The student has not previously received a state need grant from that institution;

(ii) The student completes the required free application for federal student aid;

(iii) The institution has reviewed the student's financial condition, and the financial condition of the student's family if the student is a dependent student, and has determined that the student is likely eligible for a state need grant; and

(iv) The student has signed a document attesting to the fact that the financial information provided on the free application for federal student aid and any additional financial information provided directly to the institution is accurate and complete, and that the student agrees to repay the institution for the grant amount if the student submitted false or incomplete information.

(6) As used in this section, "former foster youth" means a person who is at least eighteen years of age, but not more than twenty-four years of age, who was a dependent of the department of social and health services at the time he or she attained the age of eighteen.

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