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**SENATE BILL 5476**

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**State of Washington 65th Legislature 2017 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Frockt, Palumbo, Conway, Nelson, Ranker, Darneille, Hasegawa, Billig, Hunt, Saldaña, Kuderer, Rolfes, Keiser, Liias, Pedersen, Carlyle, and Mullet

AN ACT Relating to expanding state need grant eligibility; amending RCW 28B.92.060; and creating new sections.

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The legislature finds that paying for college is increasingly difficult for middle and lower income families. The nationwide average cost of attending college for a single year is twenty-three thousand six hundred eighty-eight dollars, and a Washington student who is an only child is currently ineligible for a state need grant if his or her family income is greater than thirty-one thousand dollars. It is the intent of the legislature to expand the number of students eligible for the state need grant, so that more Washington families can afford to give their children access to the great universities and community and technical colleges in this state.

**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. Families that earn up to eighty-five percent of the state's median family income are eligible; 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 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. Qualifications for renewal will include maintaining satisfactory academic progress toward completion of an eligible program as determined by the office. 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.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  Sections 1 and 2 of this act may be known and cited as the state need grant eligibility expansion act.

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