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**HOUSE BILL 1425**

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**State of Washington 67th Legislature 2021 Regular Session**

**By** Representatives Taylor, Leavitt, Valdez, Santos, J. Johnson, Ortiz-Self, Simmons, Rule, Ramel, Chopp, Pollet, Hackney, and Morgan

AN ACT Relating to amending the opportunity scholarship act to expand scholarships for community and technical college students; amending RCW 28B.145.010, 28B.145.030, 28B.145.040, and 28B.145.100; and creating a new section.

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The legislature finds that higher education is pivotal in delivering training to Washington citizens at all stages of their careers and ages. A skilled workforce increases productivity, boosts outputs, and propels growth in Washington's economy. The legislature further finds that a well-trained, highly skilled workforce provides Washington citizens with greater opportunities and skill sets to efficiently and confidently meet the changing demands of a transforming economy. Furthermore, a STEM-based education provides Washington's citizens with real-world applications to develop a variety of skill sets needed in today's global economy.

The legislature further finds that the Washington state opportunity scholarship is an innovative public private partnership that has been successful building a qualified workforce to fill Washington's high-demand STEM, health care, and trade industries. The Washington state opportunity scholarship has successfully created opportunities for communities historically left out of higher education and STEM, including women, students of color, and first-generation college students. In addition, the Washington state opportunity scholarship has been shown to change communities by breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

The legislature also finds that higher education is a key driver of individual growth and prosperity, and is an effective way to bridge societal inequities that disproportionately afflict low-income communities and communities of color. The legislature further finds that these gaps will be further widened in the current global pandemic, which will exacerbate long-term impacts on these communities in intergenerational poverty, job attainment, job stability, and wage growth.

Therefore, it is the intent of the legislature to amend the existing Washington state opportunity scholarship program to eliminate false barriers for students eligible for the scholarship and provide additional educational opportunities for Washington's citizens. This legislative intent is particularly urgent during the global pandemic where additional skills and opportunities will be vital for Washington citizens as the state moves toward recovery from the current global pandemic.

**Sec.**  RCW 28B.145.010 and 2019 c 406 s 63 are each amended to read as follows:

The definitions in this section apply throughout this chapter unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(1) "Board" means the opportunity scholarship board.

(2) "Council" means the student achievement council.

(3) "Eligible advanced degree program" means a health professional degree program beyond the baccalaureate level and includes graduate and professional degree programs.

(4) "Eligible county" has the same meaning as "rural county" as defined in RCW 82.14.370 and also includes any county that shares a common border with Canada and has a population of over one hundred twenty-five thousand.

(5) "Eligible education programs" means high employer demand and other programs of study as determined by the board.

(6) "Eligible expenses" means reasonable expenses associated with the costs of acquiring an education such as tuition, books, equipment, fees, room and board, and other expenses as determined by the program administrator in consultation with the council and the state board for community and technical colleges.

(7) "Eligible school district" means a school district of the second class as identified in RCW 28A.300.065(2).

(8) "Eligible student" means a resident student who ((~~received his or her high school diploma or high school equivalency certificate as provided in RCW 28B.50.536 in Washington and who~~)):

(a)(i) ((~~Has~~)) Received his or her high school diploma or high school equivalency certificate as provided in RCW 28B.50.536 in Washington and has been accepted at a four-year institution of higher education into an eligible education program leading to a baccalaureate degree;

(ii) ((~~Will~~)) Received his or her high school diploma or high school equivalency certificate as provided in RCW 28B.50.536 in Washington and will attend a two-year institution of higher education and intends to transfer to an eligible education program at a four-year institution of higher education;

(iii) Has been accepted at an institution of higher education into a professional-technical certificate or degree program in an eligible education program;

(iv) Has been accepted at an institution of higher education ((~~into a professional-technical certificate~~)) in an eligible education program ((~~in an eligible education program~~)) leading to an industry-recognized credential; or

(v) Has been accepted at an institution of higher education into an eligible advanced degree program that leads to credentials in health professions;

(b) Declares an intention to obtain an industry-recognized credential, a professional-technical certificate, professional-technical degree, baccalaureate degree, or an advanced degree; and

(c) Has a family income at or below one hundred twenty-five percent of the state median family income at the time the student applies for an opportunity scholarship.

(9) "Gift aid" means financial aid received from the federal Pell grant, the Washington college grant program in chapter 28B.92 RCW, the college bound scholarship program in chapter 28B.118 RCW, the opportunity grant program in chapter 28B.50 RCW, or any other state grant, scholarship, or worker retraining program that provides funds for educational purposes with no obligation of repayment. "Gift aid" does not include student loans, work-study programs, the basic food employment and training program administered by the department of social and health services, or other employment assistance programs that provide job readiness opportunities and support beyond the costs of tuition, books, and fees.

(10) "High employer demand program of study" has the same meaning as provided in RCW 28B.50.030.

(11) "Industry-recognized credential" means a license or professional certification recognized by employers as necessary for employment that is obtained through a noncredit-bearing program at a community or technical college, as defined in chapter 28B.50 RCW.

(12) "Participant" means an eligible student who has received a scholarship under the opportunity scholarship program.

((~~(12)~~)) (13) "Private sources," "private funds," "private contributions," or "private sector contributions" means donations from private organizations, corporations, federally recognized Indian tribes, municipalities, counties, and other sources, but excludes state dollars.

((~~(13)~~)) (14) "Professional-technical certificate" means a program as approved by the state board for community and technical colleges under RCW 28B.50.090(7)(c), that is offered by an institution of higher education.

((~~(14)~~)) (15) "Professional-technical degree" means a program as approved by the state board for community and technical colleges under RCW 28B.50.090(7)(c), that is offered by an institution of higher education.

((~~(15)~~)) (16) "Program administrator" means a private nonprofit corporation registered under Title 24 RCW and qualified as a tax-exempt entity under section 501(c)(3) of the federal internal revenue code.

((~~(16)~~)) (17) "Resident student" has the same meaning as provided in RCW 28B.15.012.

((~~(17)~~)) (18) "Rural jobs program" means the rural county high employer demand jobs program created in this chapter.

**Sec.**  RCW 28B.145.030 and 2019 c 406 s 65 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The program administrator shall provide administrative support to execute the duties and responsibilities provided in this chapter, including but not limited to publicizing the program, selecting participants for the opportunity scholarship award, distributing opportunity scholarship awards, and achieving the maximum possible rate of return on investment of the accounts in subsection (2) of this section, while ensuring transparency in the investment decisions and processes. Duties, exercised jointly with the board, include soliciting funds and setting annual fund-raising goals. The program administrator shall be paid an administrative fee as determined by the board.

(2) With respect to the opportunity scholarship program, the program administrator shall:

(a) Establish and manage the specified accounts created in (b) of this subsection, into which to receive grants and contributions from private sources as well as state matching funds, and from which to disburse scholarship funds to participants;

(b) Solicit and accept grants and contributions from private sources, via direct payment, pledge agreement, or escrow account, of private sources for deposit into any of the specified accounts created in this subsection (2)(b) upon the direction of the donor and in accordance with this subsection (2)(b):

(i) The "scholarship account," whose principal may be invaded, and from which scholarships must be disbursed for baccalaureate programs beginning no later than December 1, 2011, if, by that date, state matching funds in the amount of five million dollars or more have been received. Thereafter, scholarships shall be disbursed on an annual basis beginning no later than May 1, 2012, and every October 1st thereafter;

(ii) The "student support pathways account," whose principal may be invaded, and from which scholarships may be disbursed for eligible education programs leading to an industry-recognized credential, professional-technical certificate, or professional-technical degree ((~~programs~~)) in the fiscal year following appropriations of state matching funds. Thereafter, scholarships shall be disbursed on an annual basis;

(iii) The "advanced degrees pathways account," whose principal may be invaded, and from which scholarships may be disbursed for eligible advanced degree programs in the fiscal year following appropriations of state matching funds. Thereafter, scholarships shall be disbursed on an annual basis;

(iv) The "endowment account," from which scholarship moneys may be disbursed for baccalaureate programs from earnings only in years when:

(A) The state match has been made into both the scholarship and the endowment account; and

(B) The state appropriations for the Washington college grant program under chapter 28B.92 RCW meet or exceed state appropriations for the state need grant made in the 2011-2013 biennium, adjusted for inflation, and eligibility for Washington college grant recipients is at least seventy percent of state median family income;

(v) An amount equal to at least fifty percent of all grants and contributions must be deposited into the scholarship account until such time as twenty million dollars have been deposited into the scholarship account, after which time the private donors may designate whether their contributions must be deposited to the scholarship account, the student support pathways account, the advanced degrees pathways account, or the endowment account. The board and the program administrator must work to maximize private sector contributions to these accounts to maintain a robust scholarship program while simultaneously building the endowment, and to determine the division between the accounts in the case of undesignated grants and contributions, taking into account the need for a long‑term funding mechanism and the short‑term needs of families and students in Washington. The first five million dollars in state match, as provided in RCW 28B.145.040, shall be deposited into the scholarship account and thereafter the state match shall be deposited into the specified accounts created in this subsection (2)(b) in equal proportion to the private funds deposited in each account, except that no more than one million dollars in state match shall be deposited into the advanced degrees pathways account in a single fiscal biennium; and

(vi) Once moneys in the opportunity scholarship match transfer account are subject to an agreement under RCW 28B.145.050(5) and are deposited in the scholarship account, the student support pathways account, the advanced degrees pathways account, or the endowment account under this section, the state acts in a fiduciary rather than ownership capacity with regard to those assets. Assets in the scholarship account, the student support pathways account, the advanced degrees pathways account, and the endowment account are not considered state money, common cash, or revenue to the state;

(c) Provide proof of receipt of grants and contributions from private sources to the council, identifying the amounts received by name of private source and date, and whether the amounts received were deposited into the scholarship account, the student support pathways account, the advanced degrees pathways account, or the endowment account;

(d) In consultation with the council and the state board for community and technical colleges, make an assessment of the reasonable annual eligible expenses associated with eligible education programs and eligible advanced degree programs identified by the board;

(e) Determine the dollar difference between tuition fees charged by institutions of higher education in the 2008-09 academic year and the academic year for which an opportunity scholarship is being distributed;

(f) Develop and implement an application, selection, and notification process for awarding opportunity scholarships;

(g) Ensure that if the private source is from a federally recognized Indian tribe, municipality, or county, an amount at least equal to the value of the private source plus the state match is awarded to participants within that federally recognized Indian tribe, municipality, or county according to the federally recognized Indian tribe's, municipality's, or county's program rules;

(h) Determine the annual amount of the opportunity scholarship for each selected participant. The annual amount shall be at least one thousand dollars or the amount determined under (e) of this subsection, but may be increased on an income-based, sliding scale basis up to the amount necessary to cover all reasonable annual eligible expenses as assessed pursuant to (d) of this subsection, or to encourage participation in industry-recognized credential programs, professional-technical certificate programs, professional-technical degree programs, baccalaureate degree programs, or eligible advanced degree programs identified by the board;

(i) Distribute scholarship funds to selected participants. Once awarded, and to the extent funds are available for distribution, an opportunity scholarship shall be automatically renewed as long as the participant annually submits documentation of filing both a free application for federal student aid (FAFSA) and for available federal education tax credits including, but not limited to, the American opportunity tax credit, or if ineligible to apply for federal student aid, the participant annually submits documentation of filing a state financial aid application as approved by the office of student financial assistance; and until the participant withdraws from or is no longer attending the program, completes the program, or has taken the credit or clock hour equivalent of one hundred twenty-five percent of the published length of time of the participant's program, whichever occurs first;

(j) Notify institutions of scholarship recipients who will attend their institutions and inform them of the terms of the students' eligibility; and

(k) For participants enrolled in an eligible advanced degree program, document each participant's employment following graduation.

(3) With respect to the opportunity expansion program, the program administrator shall:

(a) Assist the board in developing and implementing an application, selection, and notification process for making opportunity expansion awards; and

(b) Solicit and accept grants and contributions from private sources for opportunity expansion awards.

**Sec.**  RCW 28B.145.040 and 2019 c 406 s 66 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The opportunity scholarship program is established.

(2) The purpose of this scholarship program is to provide scholarships that will help low and middle-income Washington residents earn industry-recognized credentials, professional-technical certificates, professional-technical degrees, baccalaureate degrees in high employer demand and other programs of study, and advanced degrees in health professions, and encourage them to remain in the state to work. The program must be designed for students starting eligible education programs leading to an industry-recognized credential, professional-technical certificate or degree programs, students starting at two-year institutions of higher education and intending to transfer to four-year institutions of higher education, students starting at four-year institutions of higher education, and students enrolled in eligible advanced degree programs.

(3) The opportunity scholarship board shall determine which programs of study, including but not limited to high employer demand programs, are eligible for purposes of the opportunity scholarship. For eligible advanced degree programs, the board shall limit scholarships to eligible students enrolling in programs that lead to credentials in health professions.

(4)(a) The source of funds for the program shall be a combination of private grants and contributions and state matching funds. A state match may be earned under this section for private contributions made on or after June 6, 2011.

(b) The state match must be based on donations and pledges received as of the date each official state caseload forecast is submitted by the caseload forecast council to the legislative fiscal committees, as provided under RCW 43.88C.020. The purpose of this subsection (4)(b) is to ensure the predictable treatment of the program in the budget process by clarifying the calculation process of the state match required by this section and ensuring the program is budgeted at maintenance level.

(c) A state match, up to a maximum of fifty million dollars annually, shall be provided beginning the later of January 1, 2014, or January 1st next following the end of the fiscal year in which collections of state retail sales and use tax, state business and occupation tax, and state public utility tax exceed, by ten percent the amounts collected from these tax resources in the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2008, as determined by the department of revenue.

**Sec.**  RCW 28B.145.100 and 2018 c 254 s 4 are each amended to read as follows:

(1)(a) The rural county high employer demand jobs program is created to meet the workforce needs of business and industry in rural counties by assisting students in earning certificates, associate degrees, or other industry-recognized credentials necessary for employment in high employer demand fields.

(b) Subject to the requirements of this section, the rural jobs program provides selected students scholarship funds and support services, as determined by the board, to help students meet their eligible expenses when they enroll in a community or technical college program that prepares them for high employer demand fields.

(c) The source of funds for the rural jobs program shall be a combination of private donations, grants, and contributions and state matching funds.

(2) The program administrator has the duties and responsibilities provided under this section, including but not limited to:

(a) ((~~Publicizing~~)) Publicize the rural jobs program and conducting outreach to eligible counties;

(b) In consultation with the state board for community and technical colleges, any interested community or technical college located in an eligible county, and the county's workforce development council, identify high employer demand fields within the eligible counties. When identifying high employer demand fields, the board must consider:

(i) County-specific employer demand reports issued by the employment security department or the list of statewide high-demand programs for secondary career and technical education established under RCW 28A.700.020; and

(ii) The ability and capacity of the community and technical college to meet the needs of qualifying students and industry in the eligible county;

(c) Develop and implement an application, selection, and notification process for awarding rural jobs program scholarship funds. In making determinations on scholarship recipients, the board shall use county-specific employer high-demand data;

(d) Determine the annual scholarship fund amounts to be awarded to selected students;

(e) Distribute funds to selected students;

(f) Notify institutions of higher education of the rural jobs program recipients who will attend their institutions of higher education and inform them of the scholarship fund amounts and terms of the awards; and

(g) Establish and manage an account as provided under RCW 28B.145.110 to receive donations, grants, contributions from private sources, and state matching funds, and from which to disburse scholarship funds to selected students.

(3) To be eligible for scholarship funds under the rural jobs program, a student must:

(a) Either:

(i) Be a resident of an eligible county and be enrolled in a community or technical college established under chapter 28B.50 RCW; or ((~~have~~))

(ii) Have attended and graduated from a school in an eligible school district and be enrolled in a community or technical college established under chapter 28B.50 RCW that is located in an eligible county;

(b) Be a resident student as defined in RCW 28B.15.012;

(c) ((~~Be enrolled in a community or technical college established under chapter 28B.50 RCW located in an eligible county;~~

~~(d)~~)) Be in a certificate, degree, or other industry-recognized credential or training program that has been identified by the board as a program that prepares students for a high employer demand field;

((~~(e)~~)) (d) Have a family income that does not exceed seventy percent of the state median family income adjusted for family size; and

((~~(f)~~)) (e) Demonstrate financial need according to the free application for federal student aid or the Washington application for state financial aid.

(4) To remain eligible for scholarship funds under the rural jobs program, the student must maintain a cumulative grade point average of 2.0.

(5) A scholarship award under the rural jobs program may not result in a reduction of any gift aid. Nothing in this section creates any right or entitlement.

**--- END ---**