H-2017.2

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**HOUSE BILL 1835**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**State of Washington 67th Legislature 2022 Regular Session**

**By** Representatives Hansen, Leavitt, Santos, Simmons, Chopp, Slatter, Bergquist, Valdez, Pollet, and Ormsby

AN ACT Relating to outreach and completion initiatives to increase postsecondary enrollment; amending RCW 28B.92.200; adding a new section to chapter 28B.77 RCW; adding a new section to chapter 28B.10 RCW; adding new sections to chapter 28B.92 RCW; and creating new sections.

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The legislature recognizes that, in 2020, Washington ranked 49th nationally for completion of the free application for federal student aid among high school seniors. The free application for federal student aid is the form that prospective and current postsecondary education students use to receive federal and state financial aid, such as the federal Pell grant, the Washington college grant, the college bound scholarship, the opportunity scholarship, federal student loans, and many other financial resources for college. For students who cannot file a free application for federal student aid, the state has an alternative financial aid application called the Washington state application for financial aid. The free application for federal student aid is a strong indicator for college enrollment. Ninety-two percent of high school seniors who completed the free application for federal student aid enrolled in a postsecondary institution by the November following graduation versus 51 percent of students who did not complete a free application for federal student aid. In addition, the legislature recognizes that the pandemic has exacerbated equity gaps in college access as colleges and universities are experiencing decreases in enrollments among low-income students, despite having one of the largest and most generous need-based financial aid programs in the country. The legislature recognizes that the Washington college grant program established in chapter 28B.92 RCW, which education trust called "the most equity-focused free college program in the country" is a critical tool to address these equity gaps and help students enter college and apprenticeships. Therefore, it is the legislature's intent to establish an outreach initiative for the Washington college grant and an outreach and completion initiative for the free application for federal student aid and Washington state application for financial aid to help students succeed.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 28B.77 RCW to read as follows:

(1) Subject to availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the student achievement council shall conduct a statewide marketing campaign to increase awareness of the Washington college grant program established in chapter 28B.92 RCW. The student achievement council shall issue a request for proposal for hiring a marketing firm that will produce high quality advertisements to promote the state's largest financial aid program. Advertisements should be marketed towards potential postsecondary students and their parents with the goal of increasing awareness of the Washington college grant program to further the state's educational attainment goals. The advertisements may include television commercials, billboards, advertisements on public transit, paid internet search advertisements, and social media marketing.

(2) Subject to availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the student achievement council shall send letters to families who may be eligible for the Washington college grant to inform them of their potential eligibility.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 28B.10 RCW to read as follows:

Subject to availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the institutions of higher education shall develop and administer a free application for federal student aid and Washington state application for financial aid outreach and completion initiative.

(1) The institutions of higher education shall employ outreach specialists to work directly with high schools. The outreach specialists shall make significant contact with high school students and their families for the purpose of increasing high school student free application for federal student aid and Washington state application for financial aid completion rates. It is the legislature's intent that the outreach specialists be employed at a ratio of one to 600 high school students, with 60 percent of the outreach specialists employed by community and technical colleges and 40 percent employed by the public four-year institutions of higher education. The outreach specialists shall use the free application for federal student aid and Washington state application for financial aid data maintained by the student achievement council to conduct targeted outreach and free application for federal student aid and Washington state application for financial aid completion assistance to high school seniors. The outreach specialists shall conduct other outreach as appropriate, including virtual or in-person presentations with students and families, announcements on school intercoms and social media channels, outreach to recent high school graduates as peer messengers, and events at school college or career fairs.

(2) The institutions of higher education shall report to the appropriate committees of the legislature in accordance with RCW 43.01.036 by December 1, 2023, on the free application for federal student aid and Washington state application for financial aid outreach and completion initiative. The report must include details on how the institutions of higher education used the funding and how the initiatives worked to increase free application for federal student aid and Washington state application for financial aid completion rates. The report must also include before and after free application for federal student aid and Washington state application for financial aid completion data and specific details about the number of high school students assisted in completing the free application for federal student aid and Washington state application for financial aid.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) Subject to availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the student achievement council shall select an organization or organizations with a proven track record of working with historically underrepresented populations to implement a community grant program to increase free application for federal student aid and Washington state application for financial aid completion. The organization or organizations selected shall:

(a) Be embedded in their respective community and have a strong foundation of trust among members of the community; and

(b) Be committed to working directly with individual members of their community to assist with one-on-one free application for federal student aid and Washington state application for financial aid completion.

(2) The organization or organizations selected for the grant program shall report back to the student achievement council on the progress of their work, complete with data on the number of individuals assisted and how the organization boosted free application for federal student aid and Washington state application for financial aid completion rates. The student achievement council shall compile this information and report back to the appropriate committees of the legislature in accordance with RCW 43.01.036 by December 1, 2022.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) Subject to availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the state library shall administer a grant program and distribute grants to local public libraries to conduct outreach to their communities with the purpose of increasing free application for federal student aid and Washington state application for financial aid completion rates.

(2) The state library shall, as a condition of the grant program, require local public libraries to partner with community-based organizations including, where appropriate, organizations with proven track records of working with historically underrepresented populations, to implement a community grant program to increase free application for federal student aid and Washington state application for financial aid completion. The organization or organizations selected shall:

(a) Be embedded in their respective community and have a strong foundation of trust among members of the community; and

(b) Be committed to working directly with individual members of their community to assist with one-on-one free application for federal student aid and Washington state application for financial aid completion.

(3) The state library shall report back to the appropriate committees of the legislature in accordance with RCW 43.01.036 by December 1, 2022, on the progress of the library outreach project to boost free application for federal student aid and Washington state application for financial aid completion rates.

**Sec.**  RCW 28B.92.200 and 2019 c 406 s 19 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The Washington college grant program is created to provide a statewide free college program for eligible participants and greater access to postsecondary education for Washington residents. The Washington college grant program is intended to increase the number of high school graduates and adults that can attain a postsecondary credential and provide them with the qualifications needed to compete for job opportunities in Washington.

(2) The office shall implement and administer the Washington college grant program and is authorized to establish rules necessary for implementation of the program.

(3) The legislature shall appropriate funding for the Washington college grant program. Allocations must be made on the basis of estimated eligible participants enrolled in eligible institutions of higher education or apprenticeship programs. All eligible students are entitled to a Washington college grant beginning in academic year 2020-21.

(4) The office shall award Washington college grants to all eligible students beginning in academic year 2020-21.

(5) To be eligible for the Washington college grant, students must meet the following requirements:

(a) Demonstrate financial need under RCW 28B.92.205 or be receiving one of the following types of public assistance:

(i) Temporary assistance for needy families under chapter 74.08 RCW;

(ii) Aged, blind, or disabled assistance benefits under chapter 74.62 RCW; or

(iii) Refugee cash assistance;

(b)(i) Be enrolled or accepted for enrollment for at least three quarter credits or the equivalent semester credits at an institution of higher education in Washington as defined in RCW 28B.92.030; or

(ii) Be enrolled in a registered apprenticeship program approved under chapter 49.04 RCW;

(c) Be a resident student as defined in RCW 28B.15.012(2) (a) through (e);

(d) File an annual application for financial aid as approved by the office; and

(e) Must not have earned a baccalaureate degree or higher from a postsecondary institution.

(6) Washington college grant eligibility may not extend beyond five years or one hundred twenty-five percent of the published length of the program in which the student is enrolled or the credit or clock-hour equivalent.

(7) Institutional aid administrators shall determine whether a student eligible for the Washington college grant in a given academic year may remain eligible for the ensuing year if the student's family income increases by no more than three percent.

(8) Qualifications for receipt and renewal include maintaining satisfactory academic progress toward completion of an eligible program as determined by the office and established in rule.

(9) Should a 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 of higher education according to the institution of higher education's policy for issuing refunds, except as provided in RCW 28B.92.070.

(10) An eligible student enrolled on a part-time basis shall receive a prorated portion of the Washington college grant for any academic period in which he or she is enrolled on a part-time basis.

(11) The Washington college grant is intended to be used to meet the costs of postsecondary education for students with financial need. The student shall be awarded all need-based financial aid for which the student qualifies as determined by the institution.

(12) Students and participating institutions of higher education shall comply with all the rules adopted by the council for the administration of this chapter.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 28B.92 RCW to read as follows:

(1) The office shall enter into a data-sharing agreement with the department of social and health services to facilitate the sharing of individual-level data. The department of social and health services shall send the office a list of all individuals receiving benefits under the public assistance programs listed under RCW 28B.92.200(5) on at least an annual basis. The office shall use the list to confirm students' eligibility for the Washington college grant program, without requiring the student to fill out a separate financial aid form.

(2) For high school students in 10th, 11th, and 12th grades whose families are receiving benefits under one of the public assistance programs listed under RCW 28B.92.200(5), the office shall issue a certificate to the student that validates the student's financial need eligibility for the Washington college grant program. The certificate is good for one year after high school graduation and may be used upon enrollment in an eligible institution of higher education, provided the student meets the other Washington college grant eligibility requirements.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 28B.92 RCW to read as follows:

Institutions of higher education authorized to participate in the Washington college grant program shall enter into data-sharing agreements with the office to facilitate the sharing of contact information of individuals who qualify for the Washington college grant through a public assistance program. The institutions of higher education shall use this information to conduct outreach directly to Washington college grant eligible individuals, such as through mailings that promote attending their specific institution for free with the Washington college grant.

**--- END ---**