

HOUSE BILL REPORT

2E3SSB 5598

As Reported By House Committee On:
Higher Education

Title: An act relating to higher education scholarships.

Brief Description: Creating the Washington's promise scholarship program.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Higher Education (originally sponsored by Senators McAuliffe, Finkbeiner, West, Jacobsen, Long, Kline, Costa, Snyder, Eide, Patterson, Hale and Winsley; by request of Governor Locke).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 2/16/00, 2/23/00 [DPA].

**Brief Summary of Second Engrossed Third Substitute Bill
(As Amended by House Committee)**

- Establishes the Washington promise scholarship that awards eligible students up to two years worth of tuition at the public community college rate.
- Students must meet both merit and financial requirements for eligibility.
- Students who are graduates of public and private schools, as well as those receiving home-based instruction, qualify if they meet the merit and financial requirements.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Carlson, Republican Co-Chair; Kenney, Democratic Co-Chair; Lantz, Democratic Vice Chair; Radcliff, Republican Vice Chair; Dunn; Edmonds; Esser and Gombosky.

Staff: Erika Prager (786-7120).

Background:

The Legislature appropriated \$9 million in the 1999-2001 budget to the Higher Education Coordinating Board to establish the Washington promise scholarship program. Students are eligible if they are in the top 10 percent of their graduating class in 1999 or the top 15 percent in 2000, and their families earn no more than 135 percent of the state median family income. Eligible students may receive up to two years worth of community college tuition. In 1999, the number of eligible students exceeded estimates. As a result, grants awarded during the first year were less than the full resident community college tuition. The scholarship program will end on June 30, 2001, unless it is established into law or included in the 2001-2003 budget.

Summary of Amended Bill:

The Washington promise scholarship is established. This merit and need-based scholarship, implemented by the Higher Education Coordinating Board, is awarded to students based on two specific eligibility criteria. The award consists of two years of tuition at the community college full-time tuition rate.

Eligibility. Eligibility is based on academic merit and student family income limit.

Academic merit

Before the K-12 certificate of mastery is required, students graduating in 2001 or 2002 from public or approved private high schools whose class rank is within the top 15 percent of their high school graduating class are eligible. Beginning with the 2003 graduating class, students who pass the Washington assessment of student learning (WASL) on their first attempt in the 10th grade or who are in the top 15 percent of their graduating class are eligible. Students who are participating in home-based instruction are also eligible if they pass the WASL on their first attempt. Students who receive home-based instruction or attend private schools may take the WASL at state expense.

After the K-12 certificate of mastery is required, students graduating from public and approved private high schools and those participating in home-based instruction are eligible if they pass the certificate of mastery on their first attempt.

Financial need

The financial eligibility criterion is met for students whose family income does not exceed 135 percent of the state median family income based on family size. This is approximately equivalent to \$69,000 for a family of four.

Implementation. The Washington promise scholarship is administered by the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB). All money for the scholarship is deposited into an account created in the custody of the state treasurer. The HECB determines the amount of the scholarship depending on available funds. The state need grant is given funding priority. Priority is defined as being able to provide need grants to qualified

students whose family income is at or below 65 percent of the state median income adjusted for family size.

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction provides class rank information and the Washington assessment for student learning results to the HECB.

Scholarship Use and Limitations. The Washington promise scholarship may be used for college-related expenses, including but not limited to, tuition, room and board, books, materials, and transportation. The scholarship can only be used to attend institutions in Washington for the purposes of receiving undergraduate education and must be used within six years.

Amended Bill Compared to Second Engrossed Third Substitute Bill: The striking amendment clarifies that both public and private high school graduates, as well as students receiving home-based instruction are eligible. Students attending private high schools and those that receive home-based instruction may take the Washington assessment of student learning at state expense. Students do not have the option of using the Scholastic Attitude Test (SAT) to meet the academic merit requirements for the promise scholarship.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: The bill takes effect immediately.

Testimony For: (Engrossed third substitute) This bill puts into law what has already been set in motion in the budget. Students are already receiving scholarships; we need to guarantee they will keep getting them. The promise scholarship supports educational reform in the state. It is also easier for the Higher Education Coordinating Board to administer the program if it is a long-term program that is "on the books." One-third of home schooled students do not want to take the WASL. Students who are home schooled should be exempt from education reform requirements. The SAT is actually a more rigorous standard since only a subgroup of all students take the SAT while all students take the WASL.

Testimony Against: The state constitution poses a problem for this bill. Public money can only be used at non-sectarian institutions as noted in *Weiss v. Bruno*. The whole bill could be jeopardized if it becomes invalidated by the state supreme court.

Testified: (In support) Carolyn Busch, Office of the Governor/Office of Financial Management; Bruce Botka, Higher Education Coordinating Board; Greg Williamson, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; Renee Visich, Washington Student

Lobby; and Tom Parker, Washington Association of Independent Colleges and Universities.

(Opposed) Jerry Sheehan, ACLU-Washington.