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## Higher Education Committee

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### HB 2820

**Brief Description:** Establishing the Washington promise program, which provides for universal and affordable access to community and technical colleges for all Washingtonians.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Pollet, Zeiger, Sells, Tarleton, Ortiz-Self, Ormsby, S. Hunt, Frame, Bergquist, Reykdal, Robinson, Fitzgibbon, McBride, Kilduff, Morris, Stanford, Walkinshaw, Farrell, Hudgins, Hickel, Goodman and Santos.

#### Brief Summary of Bill

- Creates the Washington Promise Program (promise) to provide free community or technical college (CTC) tuition and fees to eligible students enrolled in an associate degree program, an academic program with a transfer articulation agreement, or a technical or professional program that leads to a postsecondary credential.
- Establishes that students eligible for the promise include those who are a Washington resident, have not previously earned a bachelor degree, are admitted to an eligible degree or certificate program at a CTC, complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid or the Washington Application for State Financial Aid each year of eligibility, and maintain a 2.0 grade point average after the student's first 45 credits.
- Establishes that a student becomes ineligible for the promise once they earn an associate degree or credential, earn 120 credits, or four calendar years pass since the student began receiving benefits.
- Provides a cost of attendance stipend of \$1,500 for students who have a family income that does not exceed 70 percent of the state median family income.
- Requires a report to the legislature by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges and a program evaluation by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy.
- Requires the State Board to develop a plan to offer all promise students a student success course before or during their first enrollment period, and to implement the plan by the 2018-19 academic year.
- Requires the Caseload Forecast Council to forecast the number of eligible students expected to attend a CTC.

*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

**Hearing Date:** 2/3/16

**Staff:** Megan Mulvihill (786-7304).

**Background:**

**The Tennessee Promise.**

Proposals offering free tuition are often referred to as Promise Programs. Tennessee was the first state to pass such a program with the Tennessee Promise. The program offers free tuition and mandatory fees for Tennessee high school graduates who enroll full-time in a qualifying institution of higher education for the fall term following graduation, or prior to 19 years of age if the student received a General Education Development (GED) certificate or equivalent. To be eligible for the program, the student must maintain a 2.0 grade point average (GPA), fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), complete eight hours of community service prior to the start of each term, and attend required orientation and meetings with mentors. The student becomes ineligible once they receive a diploma, an associate's degree, or have been enrolled in the program for 2.5 years. In the program's first year, over 58,000 students applied.

**The Oregon Promise.**

The Oregon Promise passed in 2015, which provides free community and technical college tuition to recent Oregon high school graduates and those who earned a GED certificate or equivalent within six months of leaving high school. To be eligible, the student must have maintained a 2.5 GPA in high school and cannot have a postsecondary degree or completed 90 credit hours of postsecondary coursework. The students also needs to fill out a FAFSA and maintain a 2.5 GPA during each term the student is enrolled in the program. In addition, each student must pay \$50 of tuition each term. The Oregon Promise is a last-dollar program, which means that any other grant aid the student receives, such as the federal PELL grant, is applied first and the state covers any remaining tuition balance. However, the minimum grant each eligible student receives is \$1,000. Oregon expects 4,000 to 6,000 students to benefit from the program in the first year.

**Summary of Bill:**

The Office of Student Financial Assistance (Office) must administer the Washington Promise Program (promise) for resident students seeking an associate's degree or certificate from a community or technical college. To be eligible for the promise, the student must:

- be a resident;
- not previously earned at a least a bachelor's degree;
- be admitted to an eligible degree program or certificate program at a community or technical college; and
- complete either the FAFSA or the Washington Application for State Financial Aid (WASFA) each academic year in which the student seeks eligibility.

An eligible degree or certificate program is an associate degree, academic programs with credits that can fully transfer via an articulation agreement toward a baccalaureate degree or postbaccalaureate degree at an institution of higher education, or a professional and technical program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential.

To remain eligible for the promise, a student needs to maintain a cumulative grade point average of 2.0 after he or she earns 45 credits. A student remains eligible for the promise until they either earn an associate degree or credential, earn 120 credits, or four calendar years pass since the student first began to receive benefits under the promise.

Students who qualify for the promise must receive a grant for an amount up to the cost of tuition and fees, services and activities fees, and a cost of attendance stipend, less all other gift aid the student receives. The promise must not result in a reduction of gift aid. For students who have a family income that does not exceed 70 percent of the state median family income, the student must receive a stipend of up to \$1,500 for books and other higher education expenses. If a student enrolls at less than full-time status, the stipend must be pro-rated based on the number of credits the student is enrolled in.

The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (State Board) must report to the appropriate policy and fiscal committees of the Legislature by December 1, 2016, and each December 1st thereafter on the impacts of the promise. The report must include:

- student enrollment in eligible degree or certificate programs;
- student completion rates of credits, certificates, and degrees;
- the cost of implementation, including the cost per student;
- additional resources used to meet student needs, such as counseling, precollege courses, child care, or transportation; and
- the number of students receiving wraparound services, the number of schools providing wraparound services, and the resources needed to provide wraparound services.

The State Board must develop a plan to provide all promise students with a quarter-long student success course, during or before their first enrollment period, that teaches essential skills for college success. The State Board must provide the plan to the relevant committees of the Legislature by December 1, 2017, and begin implementation of the plan for the 2018-19 academic year.

The Washington State Institute for Public Policy must conduct a study on the effectiveness of the promise. The analysis must include changes in enrollments across the higher education system; changes in student completion and time-to-degree rates; and any change in need or delivery of student services; and the fiscal impact of the program on students, community or technical colleges, and the state. The report is due to the Legislature by December 1, 2020.

The Caseload Forecast Council is required to estimate the anticipated caseload of the promise and report the forecast.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on 1/21/16.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect on July 1, 2016.