

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 6425

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As of February 10, 2020

**Title:** An act relating to establishing the American Indian cultural study grant.

**Brief Description:** Establishing the American Indian cultural study grant.

**Sponsors:** Senators Stanford, Lovelett, McCoy, Wilson, C., Nguyen, Hunt, Takko, Sheldon, Van De Wege, Liias, Das, Hasegawa and Saldaña.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Higher Education & Workforce Development: 1/23/20, 2/04/20 [DP-WM].

**Ways & Means:** 2/10/20.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Creates the Washington American Indian Cultural Study Grant for eligible students to study in certain programs.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

**Majority Report:** Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Randall, Chair; Stanford, Vice Chair; Holy, Ranking Member; Brown and Liias.

**Staff:** Kellee Gunn (786-7429)

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

**Staff:** Michele Alishahi (786-7433)

**Background:** State Scholarship Programs for American Indian Students. In 1990, the Legislature created the American Indian Endowed Scholarship (AIES). This program provides educational scholarships on a competitive basis to high-achieving, low-income resident students who have close social and cultural ties to an American Indian tribe or community within the state. Recipients must demonstrate academic merit and a commitment

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to serve American Indian communities in Washington. Funding is prioritized for upper-division and graduate students. Students may use the scholarship at public colleges and accredited independent colleges in Washington. AIES is administered by the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC), with a screening committee composed of persons involved in helping American Indian students obtain a higher education. The membership of the screening committee may include, but is not limited to, representatives of Indian tribes, urban Indians, the Governor's Office of Indian affairs, the Washington State Indian Education Association, and higher education institutions.

In 2019, the Legislature expanded the Washington Opportunity Scholarship program to accept and match private funds from a federally recognized tribes for the purpose of providing a resident student from a federally recognized tribe who received their high school diploma or high school equivalency certificate in Washington scholarship funds to attend a higher education institution in Washington. The amount available for the scholarship is dependent on the state match to the amount donated and pledges made for that purpose. The program is administered by a program administrator, on behalf of the opportunity scholarship board, consisting of members representing public and private entities.

American Indian Studies Programs. There are 29 federally recognized tribes in Washington State. Some of the public, independent, and tribal colleges in Washington State have developed degree or credential programs that focus on advancing and promoting knowledge integral to Native peoples through research, teaching, and community service. These programs include the American Indian Studies Program at the University of Washington, the Native American and Indigenous Studies Program at The Evergreen State College, and several programs at the Northwest Indian College.

**Summary of Bill:** The Washington American Indian Cultural Study Grant is established for eligible students. The grant is the difference between the tuition and fees, less the value of other grant funds, plus \$500 dollars for books and materials for eligible students. An eligible student must be a member of a federally recognized tribe, a resident of Washington, and be registered for and enrolled in courses leading to a degree or certificate in an eligible degree or certificate program. An eligible program is one intended to promote the understanding and study of specialized areas of knowledge fostering American Indian wellness, cultural revitalization, or political sovereignty, at higher education institutions in Washington. WSAC will administer the grant, in collaboration with an advisory committee. The advisory committee, composed of individuals involved in helping American Indian students obtain a higher education, must assist in program design and develop criteria for screening and selecting scholarship participants. The advisory committee may share the same members as the AIES screening committee.

Grant funds shall be disbursed no later than the fall term of the 2021 academic year if, by that time, state funds have been received for that purpose. The program is subject to appropriation.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members:** No.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Higher Education & Workforce Development):**

PRO: Evergreen's Native American Studies Program was created in the 1970s. The curriculum has grown to include other programs, including a Master's degree. Promoting specialized knowledge is important. Native enrollment in Evergreen has increased, and the graduates are holding positions within their tribes. We believe other campuses would benefit from this bill. Native American students are underrepresented in postsecondary institutions. Passing this bill will provide more opportunities to Native American students and will enable them to represent their tribes. Native American students have a 20 percent attainment rate, much less than any other group. By passing this legislation, you will be ensuring revitalization of tribal languages.

**Persons Testifying (Higher Education & Workforce Development):** PRO: Charles Adkins, Washington Student Association; Lori Blewett, Council of Faculty; Bengisu Cicek, Associated Students of University of Washington Tacoma; Annie Landis, Geoduck Student Union, Evergreen State College; Bennett Massey-Helber, Director of Legislative Affairs, Associated Students of Western Washington University.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Higher Education & Workforce Development):** No one.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Ways & Means):** PRO: This bill invests in tribal members, like myself, who fear losing their culture and language. It will ensure the revitalization of tribal language and culture.

**Persons Testifying (Ways & Means):** PRO: Charles Adkins, Washington Student Association.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Ways & Means):** No one.